Moving Pictures

A Survey Exhibition of Works by Deborah Oropallo and Collaborators

THE SCHNEIDER MUSEUM OF ART

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DI ROSA CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

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OREGON CENTER FOR THE ARTS AT SOUTHERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

All images courtesy of the artists and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco, unless otherwise noted.

Southern Oregon University is located within the ancestral homelands of the Shasta, Takelma, and Latgawa peoples who lived here since time immemorial. These Tribes were displaced during rapid Euro-American colonization, the Gold Rush, and armed conflict between 1851 and 1856. In the 1850s, discovery of gold and settlement brought thousands of Euro-Americans to their lands, leading to warfare, epidemics, starvation, and villages being burned. In 1853 the first of several treaties were signed, confederating these Tribes and others together—who would then be referred to as the Rogue River Tribe. These treaties ceded most of their homelands to the United States, and in return they were guaranteed a permanent homeland reserved for them. At the end of the Rogue River Wars in 1856, these Tribes and many other Tribes from western Oregon were removed to the Siletz Reservation and the Grand Ronde Reservation. Today, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon (https://www.grandronde.org) and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians (http://www.ctsi.nsn.us/) are living descendants of the Takelma, Shasta, and Latgawa peoples of this area. We encourage YOU to learn about the land you reside on, and to join us in advocating for the inherent sovereignty of Indigenous people.

Forewords

We are pleased to present *Moving Pictures: A Survey Exhibition of Works by Deborah Oropallo and Collaborators.* Deborah Oropallo is familiar with the Schneider Museum of Art. We have included her work in the 2019 exhibition *Apocalypse*, curated by Richard Herskowitz and me, and in the 2020 exhibition *Migrating Bodies*, curated by Jill Hartz, Richard Herskowitz, and me. These two past exhibitions were collaborations with the Ashland Independent Film Festival (AIFF) and included Rappaport's videos and video-based installations.

When I learned that Oropallo started her career as a painter, I became more curious about her work. Following a visit to her Novato, CA studio and viewing her 2021 collaborative exhibition *UPRISING* with Andy Rappaport at the Catharine Clark Gallery in San Francisco, CA, I started the conversation with both Catharine Clark and Deborah Oropallo to mount a solo exhibition of Oropallo's work at the Schneider Museum of Art. I wanted to bring our audience a taste of Oropallo's practice with examples of her progression into video-based artworks created in concert with collaborators. I also wanted to show how the ideas in these videos, have roots that reside in her 2-dimensional and sculptural works. I not only wanted to share Oropallo's growth and important career shifts evident in her montage, sculpture, installation, and media work, but also to amplify the content and meaning behind her artworks—ideas that continue to be relevant today.

Moving Pictures: A Survey Exhibition of Works by Deborah Oropallo and Collaborators came together with the hard work and dedication of Catharine Clark and her gallery team, collaborator Andy Rappaport and of course, the artist herself. The exhibition also includes examples of work by Oropallo and collaborators Michael Goldin and Jeremiah Franklin.
I would like to thank all involved for making this exhibition possible, which includes the contributors to the catalogue essays: Jeff Kelley, Alama Rosa Alvarez, Maria Porges, and Moniqe Jenkinson; the Schneider Museum of Art's team, Associate Director of Administration & Communication, Emily McPeck and Preparator & Gallery Manager, Maureen Williams, our student staff and Museum Council, Cindy Barnard, Roberta Bhasin, Sandy Friend, Michele Fulkerson, Mary Gardiner, Vivian Stubblefield, Oregon Center for the Arts Director, Andrew Gay, catalogue design by David Ruppe and printing by Brown, Portland, OR.

Scott Malbaurn
Executive Director
Schneider Museum of Art

UPRISING, 2021
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Three 4k projected videos with 2 channel sound
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: 9:33
This image: Installation view at Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco

Di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art is honored to bring *Moving Pictures: A Survey Exhibition of Works by Deborah Oropallo and Collaborators* to the San Francisco Bay Area, a region inextricably linked to the artist and her practice. Since arriving in Northern California in the early 1980s, Oropallo has nurtured, and been nurtured in return, by the region's artistic and natural ecosystems.

Shining a light on Oropallo's collaborative practices, *Moving Pictures* draws attention to the human networks endemic to the region. The personal and political are inextricable in collaborative works produced alongside Michael Goldin, Jeremiah Franklin, and Andy Rappaport, reflecting the deep intellectual and creative ties binding artists in a region that even today remains productively isolated from mainstream art markets.

Northern California's natural landscape—rugged, bucolic, and increasingly threatened—also cast a long shadow over Oropallo's work. Di Rosa's own landscape—a stunning 217-acre nature preserve located in Napa's Carneros Valley—bears the scars of fires, floods, and other effects of environmental destruction, lending vivid poignancy to Oropallo's exploration of these themes. And as Napa's native ecosystem is reshaped by industrial grapevine monoculture, Oropallo's sense of nostalgia for a lost natural world resonates mournfully in this place.

Di Rosa—an active land preserve with a focus on the intersection of art and nature, and steward of perhaps the most significant collection of contemporary Northern California art—seems in many ways the ideal institution to welcome Oropallo home. Her work is imbued with the radical, politically charged, and uniquely intimate spirit of the Bay Area arts community, offering inspiration to the next generation of artists who will leave their mark on our region. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Deborah herself, as well as Catharine Clark Gallery and the Schneider Museum of Art.

Kate Eilertsen
Executive Director and Chief Curator
Di Rosa Museum

ONE WORLD, 2021
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
35, 3½ x 6 inch custom video screens/players, 5 custom shelves with integral network switches,
2 custom video controllers, stereo speakers with subwoofer, power supply
Edition: 3 + 3AP
Running time: 6:00
This installation: 35 x 55 x 6 inches

Fuel Driven, 2018
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print on paper
50 x 80 inches

Moving Pictures

The Apocalyptic Video-Soundscapes of Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport

by JEFF KELLEY

A night on the sea in an open boat is a long night. —Stephen Crane

Paintings were the movies of the late 18th century. Hanging floor-to-ceiling in the voluminous Paris Salon, the highest ones tilted downward, collared in ornate Beaux-Arts frames, vying for the best spots on the wall, the paintings were pitching their storylines—dramas, documentaries, comedies—to the well-heeled members of the French bourgeoise who strolled by, darted about, or stood aghast below. The Salons were the art fairs of their time.

The high-minded mentor of the era was Denis Diderot, who wrote not only about the Paris Salons between 1759 and 1781, but argued passionately for the literary, non-religious meaning of painting and, in the stories told therein, the moral instruction of the aristocracy (especially Russia's Catharine the Great). As an art critic, Diderot was preoccupied with the power of art to empirically represent the subjective complexity of natural (today we might say authentic) experience. Theater, not painting, was the art form that, with its fourth wall, could function as a kind of staged Naturalism. Diderot's importance for Enlightenment painting was to apply this effect of theater to a two-dimensional visual field that, in order to come alive for the earnest viewer, required a third dimension—and that was literature, or the scripted and acted words of theater interpolated into pictures. Therein, words would animate a morality tale, the fourth wall of theater would reappear, and the otherwise static, two-dimensional art behind it would imitate life as a kind of second nature.

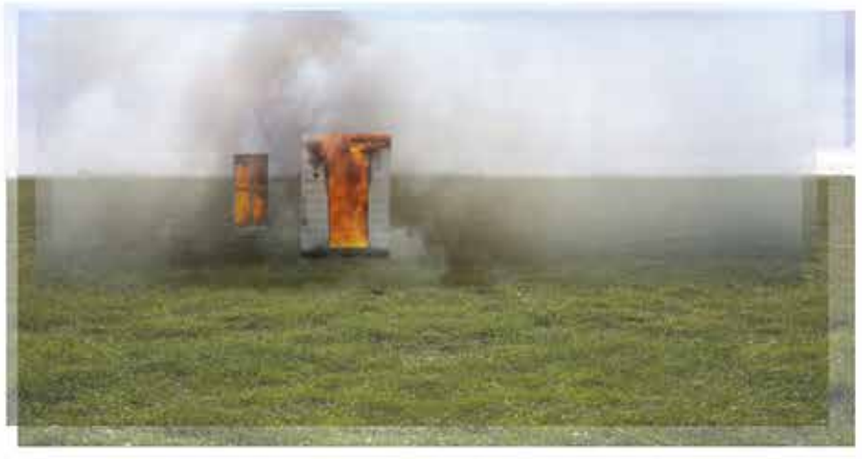
Over the past two decades, Deborah Oropallo has reinvented her painting—which began as oil on canvas—in terms of emerging digital technology, mostly by eliminating elements that were once regarded as fundamental to the nature of modern painting: paint, the act of painting, a surface to paint on, the materiality of the medium, the presence of the artist's hand, and the close proximity of the painter to the canvas. Indeed, she has gotten rid of the physical

OVAL O, 2018
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Single Channel video with 2 channel sound
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: 6:43

conventions of painting while retaining its visual appearance and historical references. Thus, Oropallo's recent works are light projections on walls or internal illuminations in video monitors. Yet they do not feel thin. Using documentary photographs of fires, floods, oil spills, and the warming edges of a melting world, Oropallo, in collaboration with Andy Rappaport, mixes still photography from journalistic sources with electronic sound (extended minimalist compositions) that drive not so much a visual narrative as a sense of imminent and underlying global catastrophe. They move forward in time the way a river rises or a glacier melts—you can't see it happening until you're waist-deep. The projected photographs are layered atop each other without entirely obscuring the ones beneath. They are less a parade of images than a semi-transparent stack, each adding to—or becoming—the surface beneath which prior images recede. Especially when they depict surfaces of water, these images feel deep; a metaphor of infinite regress, turtles all the way down. Although the pictures are digital surfaces—there *is* no actual depth—the impression is that they stack up, like pictures in a fireplace, or sink down, like people in a flood. But those impressions are after-effects, quickly vanishing memories of preceding images, like recalling the oil in the water before the oil we see in the water now. We don't have time to think about the picture we see (and just saw) before it is covered by the one we see now (and will soon lose sight of). The immediate future slips into the immediate past through the provisional holding pond of the present, which is always filling and spilling its contents. Thus, the images pollute the Romantic landscapes and seascapes Oropallo selects from the history of art or from the fields of geographic/journalistic photography to mark the environmental crime scenes of our age. To stop the spill, to douse the fire, is somehow to freeze the frame and reverse direction, but the clock never stops. Neither does the music, humming, grinding, tolling on. We intuit the tension between the ever-presentness of the image and the relentless momentum of the sound. We are attracted to both, anxious to move but locked in place, like witnesses to a slow-motion atrocity.

In the video *BLAZES*, a long three minutes and thirty one seconds, the sonorous, bass-baritone voice of Johnny Cash, singing "The Green, Green Grass of Home," intones a lugubrious yet ironic hymn that drifts across the surface of a video sequence of photographic images, layered one atop another at one-second intervals, depicting modest white clapboard houses and barns—homesteads, really—burning, licked by flames, crackling, stoking a roaring conflagration on a startlingly green prairie. What comes to mind? Maybe the Talking Heads' "Burning Down the House," an anthem of the age. An American house, charming and bright, good fences, good neighbors. Now charring, its modest pride of place reduced to skeletal, ashen remains. A little house on the prairie, a white house. A habitat. Our habitat. The hallowed grounds of grandparents, of parents' childhood homes (including Cash's childhood house in Dyess, Arkansas). A place we may remember from a dream we may have dreamed in stories heard in childhood of ancestors we longed to know, whose crumbled stone foundations now reflect the ember's heat and lay in smoldering ruin. The scorched dead grass of home.

Teardrop, 2015
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print on panel
Printed by Magnolia Editions
58 x 48 inches
Edition variée: 1/1 + 2AP



ABOVE AND FOLLOWING PAGE

BLAZES, 2018
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Single channel video with 2 channel sound
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: 3:31

CRUDE, 2022
Deborah Oropallo
Aluminum, glass, mirror, decoys, resin. 80 x 45 x 18 inches

Oropallo's burning houses look like Kansas, or Iowa, but the grass also looks like the warming, mushy tundra of the Artic. The green is acrid, microbial but not fertile, the garish hue of thawing toxins. There is never a sense that the houses are inhabited, just abandoned, and their surrounding grasslands seem forgotten, though their coordinates are likely inscribed in a yellowed county assessor's register from a long-ago land rush. Certain clusters of houses and barns look like villages torched in a rush of violence, maybe tribal, probably environmental. Home in flames. World on fire. Scaled in our minds to the horizon, with hundreds of tiny houses in a row, we imagine California, the smokey, hellish umber of another suburban wildfire, flaring up one cracker box at a time.

Sometimes Rappaport's soundscapes evoke actual space: compressed (even dense), extended (almost endless), seldom bright and airy, often dark and clouded. Because each soundscape plays throughout a given video, it enacts the literal time of that video; poetically, though, it grinds toward eternity, beyond the time frames of art. It grinds and it tolls, as if from within, as if from above. It doesn't narrate space so much as it stretches, churns, folds, and layers it. Although musical, the sounds are not distillations of the pitches, rhythms, melodies, and harmonies we know as music, but amplifications of the textures, timbres, resonances and echoes of the material world that pulsate through physical space and psychological time.

CRUDE, an unsettling six-minute, forty-second video soundscape, summons from recent memory the disastrous 2010 explosion and oil spill of the infamous Deepwater Horizon drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico, but also, through images of sailing ships from the history of Western painting, it invokes the centuries-long project of maritime exploration and exploitation. The video begins with oil derricks appearing on the gulf horizon like small black insects, while, in the foreground, surfers cut shallow, lazy arcs in the waves along the shore. This juxtaposition of heedless leisure and immanent threat is striking, as it always is in a disaster movie (or a pandemic). As the photographs overlay, images of derricks, barges, icebergs, and 19th century galleons (again, from paintings) trade places on the ocean's surface in the manner of chess pieces globally maneuvered by an invisible hand.

While the visual field is, like a movie, fully engaged, the pictures projected onto it are of various sizes, some filling the screen, most punctuating it, like visual beats, with quick successions of smaller photos, often one atop another. The smaller photographs feel like snapshots despite depicting

CRUDE, 2018
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints on paper
50 x 80 inches

ABOVE AND FOLLOWING PAGE

CRUDE, 2018
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Single channel video with 2 channel sound
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: 6:39

vast seascapes and skies. This gives rise to a string of poetic associations as the images tick along: an oil derrick becomes an ocean schooner; an oil barge echoes the declining shape of a melting iceberg; barges multiply across the horizon, like boxcars in the desert; a flat dirty sky swells into a regal sunset; a flat photographic surface is punctured by the deep space of a painting; a flock of waterfowl scatter as a fleet of kayaks assembles; gulls and galleons tangle by air and by sea; almost beneath us, a whale spouts in passing; meanwhile, we notice the light has changed and the sun is setting; a postmodern drilling rig is bright yellow and a pre-modern sailing ship is on fire; the sky darkens as ships and rigs and barges converge (as if in rescue), their lights blinking; the waters roil, ships heave and toss; the blackening sea reflects

the brightening lights of these gargantuan drilling rigs that rise from the ocean like skeletal, alien cities; 5,000 feet below, liquid clouds of crude, the color of crankcase sludge, billows up from the wellhead, fouling the deep and rising relentlessly to the surface, where it burns off on the water, pushing smoke skyward like a mushroom cloud, closing the scene on modernity.

Through all of this, the music tolls on. For *CRUDE*, Rappaport seems to have composed from a single electronic note an extended, pulsing wave—a kind of buzzing baseline—that breaks at regular intervals into a pattern of six or seven quickly thrashing beats before returning to the single note. These beats are themselves different notes, so over time a minimalist wave seems

FLOOD, 2019
3 channel video; 2 channel sound
Edition: 3 + 3AP
Running time: 6:40
Above: Installation view, Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanical Garden, Pasadena, California
Right: Video stills from *FLOOD*

to rise, hold, fall, and rise again. This tension between the single line and the quick staccato beats echoes a nautical distress call—S.O.S.—while conjuring in the mind a horizon line with intermittent peaks, like the surface of the water. One fathom below, we feel the thumping of our hearts.

Above all of this, bells toll, at first as a marker of musical time, and then, in time, they quicken and multiply in number, sounding an increasingly panicky warning that resonates in space like a chorus of pealing church steeples telling townsfolk their global village is on fire. It is too late. A kind of rapture seizes the video-scape as oil platforms burn, schooners sink, fireboats spray long, useless arcs of water at burning derricks, and plumes of black smoke gather on the blue horizon like a front of angry tornados. Indeed, *CRUDE* is a Dantesque vision of our time; the fire of Hell rises from deep in the ocean and by the time it reaches the sky we are all underwater.

From video to video, the artists have composed ecologies of images and sounds. The images may skip along the surface, or drown in the deep, and the sounds may get caught in endless eddies or rock the cradle of heaven. Compellingly, the pictures are silent, especially as they transition from one to the next; we half-expect to hear the telltale "clicks" of slides dropping during a chemical-era art history lecture. But the machinery is soundless. Without the metronome, all the action is in the play of images (and its interplay with the music). While the screen-filling seascapes set the stage, the smaller pictures of people and other debris enact a pantomime of quiet panic as they rapidly abut, sometimes overlap, and slowly dissolve. They seem to beckon each other, to reach out, to drift apart, and finally to wash away. It's these quickly paced handoffs between images, one after another, that suggests not so much a human narrative as a force of nature unconcerned with humanity. This is especially true of *FLOOD*, a video in which imperceptibly rising flood waters (maybe Houston, maybe New Orleans) inundate an urban population (or at least a lot of people) who wades and floats and carries each other to wherever it is they are trying to go.

As they do, the sound of a bow vibrates on a steel string, dragging, grating, whining as note follows mournful note, too stretched out for listeners to discern a melody, but likely a dirge to accompany the deluge. The sound never much rises or falls—it just plays on, like strings onboard the Titanic. And like Stephan Crane's "The Open Boat," from 1897, Oropallo and Rappaport's video soundscapes are forms of American Naturalism, that is, they are both ecstatic and cruel. The ecstasy rises up from the Romantic land- and seascapes, inherited from 18th century Europe and passed to America via the Oxbow bend of the Connecticut River, and the cruelty

Flood, 2019
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Three-channel video with two-channel sound
Edition: 3 + 3AP
Running time: 6:40

Black Forest Red, 2018
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints on paper
80 x 50 inches

bleeds through the utter inevitability of what the videos bear witness to. They are not documentaries (though all their visual matter is clipped from the world of photojournalism), but works of art. As such, they feel epic, almost literary, like visualizations of the opening paragraph of Crane's short story:

> *"None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops which were foaming white, and all of the men knew the color of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks."*

American literary Naturalism, though in the wake of European Romanticism, is not transcendental. It stays at the level of the earth and sea, with the details of empirical experience. It is eye level. Crane keeps his words, and those of his castaway characters (one of whom was autobiographical), within the compressed range of what they could see from their tiny open boat, despite the vastness all around and above them and the depths beneath. Romanticism was transcendent emotionally, as Neoclassicism was idealistically. But in 1897, the crew does not escape its circumstances, and something closer to existential dread seeps through the misty panorama of Romantic sublimity. God will not bail them out, and Nature doesn't care.

Fifty years earlier, in 1851, Nature, personified as a great white whale, cared with a vengeance in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick.* So did Capitan Ahab, who sought revenge for his half-eaten (now wooden) leg. We don't know whether the white whale died, but surely Ahab did, lashed by harpoon rope to the bloody back of the leviathan as it cracks the spine of Ahab's whaling ship, sending all but the narrator down in a whirlpool. *Moby Dick* marks the plunge of American literature into the sub-genre of Dark Romanticism (Poe, Hawthorn), with its interest in the irrational and the grotesque, states of intensified human emotion beyond the reach of transcendentalist light and enlightenment reason. But the sense of meaninglessness permeating "The Open Boat," perhaps the purest work of American Naturalism, foreshadows 20th century Existentialism. "Shipwrecks are apropos of nothing," Crane writes. There is just no reason why a man's downing is important to the sea.

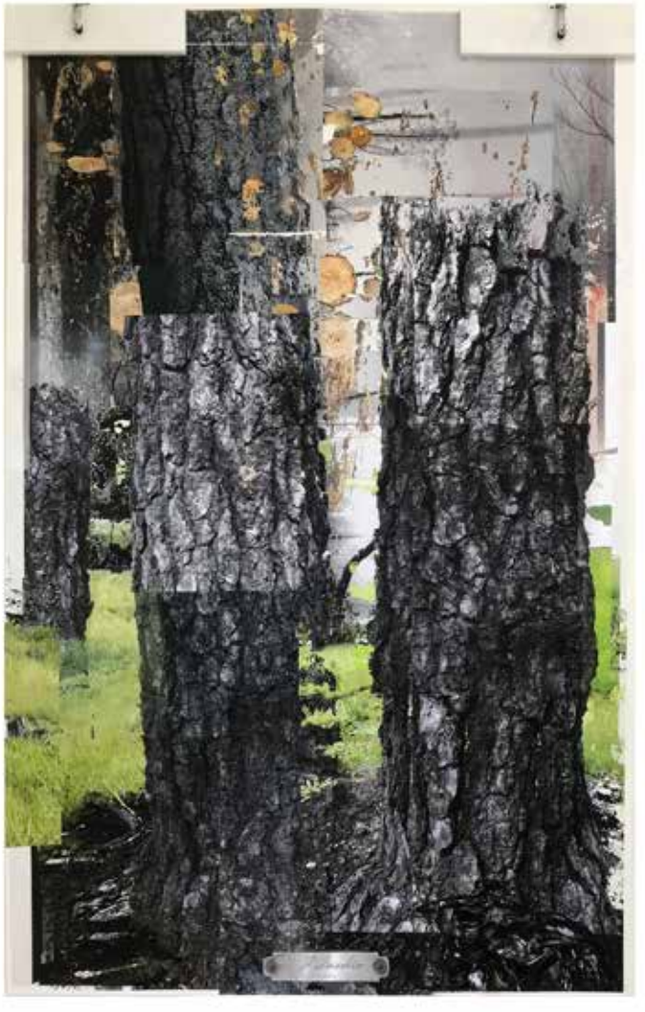
A recurring motif of Oropallo and Rappaport's videos is destruction, relentless but anticlimactic. There are no firestorms, raging beasts, or walls of water. Focus shifts from the moment of destruction to its stagnant aftermath. Likewise heroism, which is random, at the margins, or simply unwitnessed. The Romantic trope of

Man versus Nature is, in these works, an artifact of art history, a photo montage of 18th and 19th century paintings (Friedrich, Turner, Gericault) of sinking rafts, burning ships, or ill-fated vessels of discovery crushed in merciless strata of ice. The destruction pictured in Oropallo and Rappaport's videos is not saturated with intense human emotion. The lenses that capture these episodes of nature's disinterest are both photojournalistic and opportunistic, detached by necessity, sympathetic but not heartfelt. With a grim curiosity, we observe people swamped in boats, thankful we are not them, but increasingly apprehensive that we could be.

An ancestor of Oropallo and Rappaport's land- and seascape videos is the 1982 film *Koyaanisqatsi*, a slow-motion and time-lapse "tone poem" in which continuous filming of the natural and man-made environments is accompanied by a soundtrack composed by Philip Glass. In the Hopi language, Koyaanisqatsi means "unbalanced life," and the film is a masterpiece of 1970s environmentalism before climate change complicated the Man vs Nature dualism of the early ecology movement. Still, its minimalist, somewhat detached visualization of the impact of human progress upon the earth plays out across a span of time and space that, probably for the first time in cinema, transcended the romance, sublimity, and picturesqueness of our post-nuclear and pre-digital conceptions of nature as both a limitless resource and, after that, a web of systems and influences. It's like subjecting the long chords of "Appalachian Spring" to the sustained attack of *Einstein on the Beach*.

Compared with *Koyaanisqatsi*'s 46-minute expanse, Oropallo and Rappaport's video soundscapes are bite-sized; however, because they are digital, they don't have to be cinematic to pack an epic punch. They play out like anxious photo-journalistic etudes in which space and time are compressed while the sound is elongated, stretching each vignette to the breaking point of opera. Although minimalist in style—a clean structure, short visual and musical phrases, gradual change over extended time—the subject matter, writhing from within, borders on the Baroque: billows of black smoke and raging tongues of fire, sinking wooden galleons and blue ice melting, drowning photographs of wading people who may also be drowning, a low red sun, glistening tar on the sand, and faint stars in the night. "The Ecstasy of Mother Earth?"

Beginning around 2000, with then-called "Iris Prints," (invented in 1985, and since replaced by Epson printers with archival inks) Oropallo articulated a kind of middle distance between paint on canvas and pixels on screens where an image could hold its place in a dimensionless digital space. In this sense, she has always been interested in the modern practice of painting minus its haptic, hands-on physicality. Nothing holds the eye's mind like a resonant visual image suspended just beyond reach, which is where things come into focus for Oropallo. In the newer works with Rappaport, she pushes that distance toward the horizon, which opens a precipitous space at our feet—a space we can feel more than see. It is a considered space—a space of art—for which journalistic photography doesn't usually have the time.



Black Forest, 2018
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints on paper
80 x 50 inches

Oil and Water, 2016
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints on panel
Printed by Magnolia Editions
Edition variées: 1/1 + 2AP
26 x 26 inches each

Although richly digital, these video-soundscapes offer few savage close-ups or seductive details (which would be their Baroqueness). The beauty is in the distance, the ugliness at our feet. We confront a betrayal of Romanticism by the real. And at our feet is exactly where the artists lay the warm oily debris of industrial Capitalism.

We behold the Romantic landscape at a distance, until a dusty John Wayne, big as the sky, steps into view from the running board of a stagecoach. Therein, the American struggle between man and nature ensues for a new century, and man thereafter fills the picture, an anthropomorphic monument in Monument Valley. Eighty years on, we are tiny people hailing helicopters from rooftops, stranded on elevated freeways, floating down streets on inner tubes, pushing wheelchairs and shopping carts with dying elders and hapless children. We are wet, parched, our hair thickened with ash. We are forlorn refugees holding our pets, waiting for FEMA, unable to say what we've lost. The figure/ground equation has been reversed: we no longer fill the picture—the picture is what little we can see of our surroundings as water fills our low-slung open boat.

> *"Presently, it seemed that even the captain dozed, and the correspondent thought that he was the one man afloat on all the ocean. The wind had a voice as it came over the waves, and it was sadder than the end."*

In Crane's story, the captain and the correspondent mark the initial American split between the Romantic hero and the pragmatic witness. The captain is not Ahab and there is no devil fish. If Romanticism suffused the sky with human feeling, the correspondent tells his story to an indifferent sea. Journalistic objectivity is the opposite of indifference—it is profoundly interested in what it witnesses. It keeps its distance to find the subject's scale, its focus, or to frame a bigger picture. Sometimes the story is intimate, other times panoramic. We are told the best journalistic photographs capture moments that resonate beyond themselves, yet most are initially fixed in monotonous strings of before-and-after images. Those images in Oropallo and Rappaport's videos constitute a kind of staccato montage that counters the smoother motion of the flames, smoke, and waves with a sense of anxious witnessing. This anxiety feels modern, an effect—and an affect—of lens media. Therein, the Romanticism of the sea is muted and the Biblical melodrama of people caught in the deluge dissolves into news. "The media exhaust the news," said the philosopher Fredric Jameson, but Oropallo and Rappaport's anxious montage of mediated images puts human tragedy in the

American Gothic, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
Glass, decal, rawhide, wood, steel, thread, glasses
60 x 18 inches

Yarn Bombing, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
Sheep wool, buffalo horns, 6 Christmas trees, acrylic paint, hatchet
Approximately: 80 x 3 x 3 inches (each tree)

context of environmental catastrophe. No single anonymous, dispossessed person is the subject of these videos, nor even are all of them. They are human debris in the collapse of world order—not the order of nation states, societies, or economies (not yet), but of season, habitat, and species.

Romanticism's appeal involves a nostalgia for ruins, and while there are shipwrecks, oil spills, burning oceans, and melting ice plateaus in Oropallo and Rappaport's videos, taken together, as a kind of pastiche, these tropes today express the ruination of 18th century Romantic representation in painting. Drained of the mineral materiality of paint and its powdery pigments, these videos are more like referents to, rather than instances of, a two-hundred-year-old landscape of human passion. The natural world of the Romantic age is relegated to a despoiled yet picturesque backdrop for an apocalyptic setting. We recognize that backdrop, but don't quite believe it—we know the difference between clouds and billowing oil smoke, between a sinking galleon and a burning derrick. But like a projection, this picturesque landscape hangs over the horizon as a visual reminder of an eco-systemic complexity we cannot see except for the debris that washes ashore or the ash that drifts in the air.

Painting, photography, and the digital field—like three overlaid scrims—illuminate, muddy, and bleed through each other. The point is not to argue that Oropallo is a painter or produces paintings *per se* but to assert that she works in a variety of media as the painter she has always been. We still think of Robert Rauschenberg's 1961 photo-silkscreens as paintings, even though they are mostly collages. Allan Kaprow's Happenings emerged from impulses he sensed in action painting. Carolee Schneemann, the early experimental performance artist, always thought of herself as a painter: "I'm a painter. I'm still a painter and I will die a painter. Everything that I have developed has to do with extending visual principles off the canvas." Modern painting has been as much a conceptual framework for non-painting as it has a medium with its own unique material and visual properties. Maybe it has always been both.

Since 2000, Oropallo's increasingly digitized work has extended from the mineral ground of painting. Her collaborations with Rappaport leave behind that ground for a sea of pixels, and yet we don't think of them as "video art" so much as paintings by digital means. Clearly, they're electronic, 21st century artworks, but their high craft and pictorial subjects are mineralesque. The art historian T. J. Clark once noted that large format photography—the C-prints of twenty years ago by artists like Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky, and Candida Hofer—came to occupy the psychic wall space that once belonged to painting, which has been threatening to disappear for a hundred years. But painting hasn't so much disappeared as seeped into the architecture. Given the so-called immersive technology of our time, dense, meaty painting may be more important than

SMOKE STACKED, 2017
Deborah Oropallo and Jeremiah Franklin
Single channel video with editing and sound design by Jeremiah Franklin
Edition: 8 + 2AP
Running time: 2:39

Wicked Leak, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
Ceramic, resin, insect
14½ x 15 x 15 inches

ever, reassuring (or terrifying) us with expressions of corporeal existence. But a reductive spawn of the medium from 1970s conceptualism continues to occupy museum walls as a mental placeholder waiting for something new to fill it up—like, for instance, video images of oil, fire, water, and ice. If digital projections and monitors now occupy the spaces of painting, they do not displace it. Video art, which emerged in the hands of visual artists as a renegade alternative to television around 1970, will morph along with evolving technology well before painting disappears. David Antin once called television the "frightful parent" of video art, as we can also say painting was to performance art, or radio to television, the phonograph to the radio, the TV screen to the computer screen, the camera to the iPhone to the wristwatch to the heart monitor, and so on. The "death of painting" is a drawn-out, century-long affair that never quite expires, calling to mind Robert Smithson's maxim that "Poetry is always a dying language, but never a dead language."

Over the last twenty years, Oropallo has digitally erased the object of painting while infusing her newer digital works with many of 17th and 18th century painting's traditional subjects, most especially portraiture and history painting in which historical images of powerful men (Napoleon, Washington) are merged with fetishistic phantoms of beguiling and mysterious women (a lion tamer, the Queen of Hearts, a nurse). In a sense, Oropallo's critique of painting amounts to a digital dress-up (or dress-down) in which she strips away the pomp of power, the ensembles of empire, and the regalia of Romanticism in favor of a kind of digital drag with gender at its core. Indeed, when she lived in a cool industrial live/work building in a Berkeley neighborhood then transforming itself from light-manufacturing and chemical storage to a mix of artist studios and "new-economy" businesses, Oropallo—with a small child at the time (she has two now, both grown)—focused on what might be called the domestic front of the feminist avant-garde. Much of her subject matter then—electric stove burners, mouse traps, toy railroad tracks—drew upon the home-studio itself and its surrounding industrial neighborhood. In this sense, her work has been environmental for decades. When she left the East Bay in 2013 and moved to a working 20-acre farm in Marin County, her "environment" reverted from a gentrifying urban neighborhood to a loamy rural homestead. Therein, the pace and rhythms of city life gave way to the organic cycles of nitrogen, carbon, and respiration, coastal-range weather, birthing, feeding, living, and dying. The mud, blood, skins, and shit of animals were the new haptic textures of live/work farming. Oropallo's domestic/industrial studio in Berkeley, with canvases leaning against the walls and all manner of paint and ink and apparatus (including a series of Macs) arranged throughout the space, was essentially reduced to an online connection between the internet and a computer, the computer and a digital projector, and the projector and a large white wall. Oropallo seems to have captured some of that light from around the farm and ground it into a fine digital dust. This is Oropallo's studio now: a dusty beam of light in a dim outbuilding on a farm.

Head Nurse, 2017
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints,
acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas
38 x 34 inches

Nurse, 2015
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print on panel
Printed by Magnolia Editions
Edition variée: 1 of 1 + 2AP
58 x 48 inches

A farm seems an unlikely place from which to project beams of code-dust into the art world. Given the seafaring and earth-scorching Naturalism of Oropallo and Rappaport's video-soundscapes, the clean, well-lighted spaces of galleries and museums provide elegant, minimalist settings against which the digital intensity of their videos is set. Though the idea of painting is part of their background, the videos can also activate spaces less formally associated with art world aesthetics, like public parks and art fairs. For example, *FLOOD*, which debuted in 2019, was a multi-channel video projected onto an upright, three-sided (triangular) white screen (like a minimalist sailing ship) installed in—and seemingly floating upon—a reflecting pool at the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanical Garden in Pasadena. *FLOOD* came to life as the California sun set and the sky darkened, as the water in the reflecting pool blackened, as the imagery on its twenty-two-foot screens shone rising waters, sinking people, watercraft and inner tubes, and a floating coffin with flowers on it drifting by. Rappaport's slow sound offered a counter-rhythm, a kind of resistance, to the rising panic. But it could not stop the flood. The screen flickered in the night like a fiery malevolent vision that burned its own reflection into the water—a kind of digital spill.

How close are these digital moving pictures to their sources in the physical world? Do they punch holes in the gallery, bidding us step into the roiling sea and onto the smoldering tundra—into the ice and fire that groans and howls beyond? Watching them carefully tends to erase, or at least blur, our awareness of the glossy black monitors that frame them; early 21st century technology falls away and the high drama of 18th century painting reappears. If "The Open Boat" is the literary analogue of Oropallo and Rappaport's video soundscapes, Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa*, and Friedrich's *Sea of Ice*, are its pictorial precursors. As we watch, we step into our own historical memories of Romantic painting. So the videos connect with the early emotional intensity of 18th century Romanticism and the slow-burn abjectness of its post-industrial, information age ruination. Once, human feeling was expressed as nature's tempests; now, human indifference has ruined nature, and human feeling is flat as the sea. So, in the sense that scrims from early and late Romanticism are compressed against a wall plane by a projected beam of light, or illuminated across a liquid crystal screen, these digital pictures are very close indeed to their sources in the world.

As if to make this very point, at the 2019 Untitled Art fair in Miami Beach the artists presented an outdoor ensemble of nine video monitors of various sizes, some vertical, others horizontal, each collared with a golden Beaux-Arts frame, standing and hanging as if against an unseen wall with the beach and sea their backdrop. Art fair visitors watched this array from a raised platform inside a small aluminum-pole framework covered by a blue canvas roof, rather like a carnival stand on an ocean boardwalk. From the viewer's perspective, the screens occupied roughly the human field of vision—an oval of focus—but the actual sand, water, and sky leaned against them from behind, like nature pressing back upon a picture of nature. An equilibrium emerges from the tension between such grand dualities as reality vs representation, a frame vs an endless expanse, here -vs- way out there, and the present moment -vs- all that we anticipate, remember, and (try to) forget. We become aware of the interposition of the scrim of art upon life, and of the pull of life upon that scrim. It's a slow exchange without crescendo, like the wash and backwash of waves on a beach. What anchors this tension is the alignment of the ocean's horizon with the horizon lines running through the three eye-level video screens. The mind locks the scene in place, not unlike a painting in the Louvre. And yet, quite unlike a painting in the Louvre since Oropallo and Rappaport's video array, called *FLIGHT*, stands in a place very like that which it depicts. A lot of art has moved outside the gallery in the last fifty years—earthworks, performance, spectacles, systems art, telepresence—but not many paintings; Oropallo and Rappaport are calling the question in this regard, presenting a video ensemble steeped in Romantic sea- and landscape painting against a beach which is itself an outdoor extension of an art fair. At this realization, the art circus flickers briefly into focus.

And yet, we are left facing the digital contents, the slow-moving pictures and the bow-plucked strings and muffled bells. *FLIGHT*, represents wave after wave of refugees clinging to low-slung craft, floating upon and sinking

FLIGHT, 2019
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
9 channel video with 9 monitors; 2 channel sound; 9 wood and gold frames
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: 11:00
This installation: 129 x 144 x 60 inches
This image: Installation view, Untitled Art fair, Miami Beach, Florida

FLIGHT, 2019
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
9 channel video with 9 monitors; 2 channel sound; 9 wood and gold frames
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: 11:00
Above: Installation view, Untitled Art fair, Miami Beach, Florida

beneath each other as images dissolve one into the next. Taken from the internet of bitter migration from civil war and ethnic cleansing, over four hundred photographs of people afloat appear like ghosts from the sea and disappear the same way. As the minutes pass and the bells toll, the screens beneath the horizon line fill with refugees crammed into all manner of vessels, whether orange or blue inflatable lifeboats or rickety wooden rafts with bedsheet sails. Soon, the screens swell with people, their forms and faces ripe and squinting from hazy sun and haunting shadow, bodies entangled in a chiaroscuro nightmare of the twenty-first century Baroque. Individuals come into view, sometimes alone in the water. Often, they are blurred and earthy, as if squeegeed into a layer of paint. Figures and faces from famous nautical disaster paintings (again, like *The Raft of the Medusa*) drift through the boatloads of refugees as they arrive and arrive and arrive. The semi-transparency of the overlain photographs pushes them underwater and backwards in time, and this progression feels seamless until you notice the slight, mechanical tick tick tick of each image's appearance, and thereby sense a count-down for cataclysm.

The end of the world might be the never-ending dislocation of refugees from war-torn and famine plagued homelands as climate change renders certain regions uninhabitable or ungovernable. *FLIGHT* suggests the disarray of drift and the push and pull of panic. The sublimity of its video fleet, triggered by the unblinking vastness and desperate struggle of those seeking land, is matched only by the queasiness of watching its writhing, drowning masses from a raised platform on a warm sunny beach. The effect, which comes quickly, is of phantoms arising from the hazy middle distance and washing up onto the sand at our feet. The sound, a dirge as much as anything, plucks our gut strings as we watch, stricken and transfixed.

Near the end of "The Open Boat," once the crew abandons its craft and swims toward shore, Crane's correspondent observes that the water is icy, "colder than he had expected to find it off the coast of Florida." Florida (ugh). The shore, "with its white slope of sand and its green bluff ... was spread like a picture before him." The correspondent was impressed, "as one who, in a gallery, looks at a scene from Brittany or Algiers." Tossed and dragged by the waves, the correspondent "arrived in water that reached only to his waist, but his condition did not enable him to stand for more than a moment. Each wave knocked him into a heap, and the undertow pulled at him." Almost instantly, the beach "was populated with men with blankets, clothes, and flasks, and women with coffee-pots and all the remedies sacred to their

Women Wonder, 2016
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints, acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas
68 x 48 inches

Deluge, 2018
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints on paper
50 x 80 inches

minds." The crew had survived, save the oiler, who drowned within sight of the shore, his forehead touching sand that was, "between each wave, clear of the sea," Just so the Syrian boy who drowned on a Turkish resort beach in 2015, his tiny face in the sand, clearing the sea with each wave, the opposite of breathing.

Diderot believed a that great painting conveyed such emotional intensity that words to describe its meanings were unnecessary since viewers would be the interpreters. The painter reached out and the audience reached back. Since Diderot's painter-of-record was Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805), whose pictures were overwrought morality tales, any outreach was usually melodramatic and treacly. A better theorist than art critic, Diderot did help open the floodgates of audience sentiment and, in the long run, perhaps some kind of participatory impulse that helped make art modern. Fair enough. But by placing an ensemble of gold-framed video screens, each overrun with pitiless open boats overspilling with desperate voyagers, on an actual art fair beach in Miami, Oropallo and Rappaport confront us with a Salon for our time: a provisional platform for spectral images and fleeting sounds, gathered from epic real-world events, cached in the memory bank of the internet, synthesized as quasi-paintings by an actual painter, and suspended for an elite audience staged as close to a refugee's eye-level as may be allowed. Romanticism is flattened into Naturalism by journalism; squalls of sublimity, waves of indifference, ripples of clarity.

Romanticism thrilled us in ways that were often tasteless, all naked and Biblical and scary and in-your-eye, like the oculus of a devil fish, a wooden leg, or the point of a harpoon. Oropallo and Rappaport's videos retain the thrill of tragic myths European paintings premiered before the era of photography, but the Romanticism they offer is an after-effect of a dramaturgy seen only now in movies. Their digital moving pictures embrace the montage realism of journalistic photography as the mournful, never-ending cadence of our time. As the news. The swashbuckling bravado and grinding, suicidal grievance of Ahab is flattened into the sea-level survivalism of the correspondent who, as he tries to swim ashore, merely wonders whether "an individual must consider his own death to be the final phenomenon of nature." Existentialism is on the horizon.

Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport, in their collaboration, offer us portals into the vistas and depths of our shrinking planet and all the creatures, great and small, scrambling to set foot upon some forgiving soil.

Seeing Red, 2016
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints, acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas
68 x 48 inches

The pain and suffering of the people they portray are plain to see. We meet them at the edge of our lives as photo-montage phantoms. They never meet us, of course, but only our lenses, at least in that moment of first contact. Sometimes the black sinking hand of a drowning refugee seems to rise back up as if holding a lighted green lamp by a golden door. We would like to think so. But there is a screen between us, which is not only that of a digital display. It is the characteristic detachment of photojournalism, which is also that of American Naturalism. It is no accident that Crane's protagonist in "The Open Boat" is a correspondent. The space opened by this detachment always carries within it the charge of complicity with craft in the moment of crisis—do we reach for survivors or keep taking pictures? This excruciating, existential choice fills the space of journalistic detachment. It seems a space too vast to see, too layered to penetrate, too endless to hear. But the technological capacity to upload that space with counter-narratives, to layer it with the mineral intensity of painting, to echo the tolling in our heads, to evoke the memory art still holds of history, has never been so great. Oropallo and Rappaport's video-soundscapes reach out to the audiences for art and justice, reinforcing, perhaps, the privilege of distance, but also pressing us back to the edge of the end, where the sodden burden and solemn responsibility of witnessing await us.

Crane ends his story this way:

> *"When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice to the men on the shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters."*

February 2021
Oakland, California

Elegy 2, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
Bricks, sticks, straw, boar skull, decals, resin, wood, silver
51 x 8 x 12 inches
Previous page: Detail, *Elegy 2*

ABOVE AND FOLLOWING PAGE

MELTDOWN, 2018
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Single channel video with 2 channel sound
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: 6:24

Warning, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
Leather, thread, wood, resin, paper, ceramic
Installation dimensions variable
3 Leather cones: 20 x 11 x 11 inches each;
Ceramic boot, resin, and book: 25 x 23 inches

Elegy, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
Tree stump, bull horns, rug, bull fur, acrylic paint
30 x 48 x 48 inches

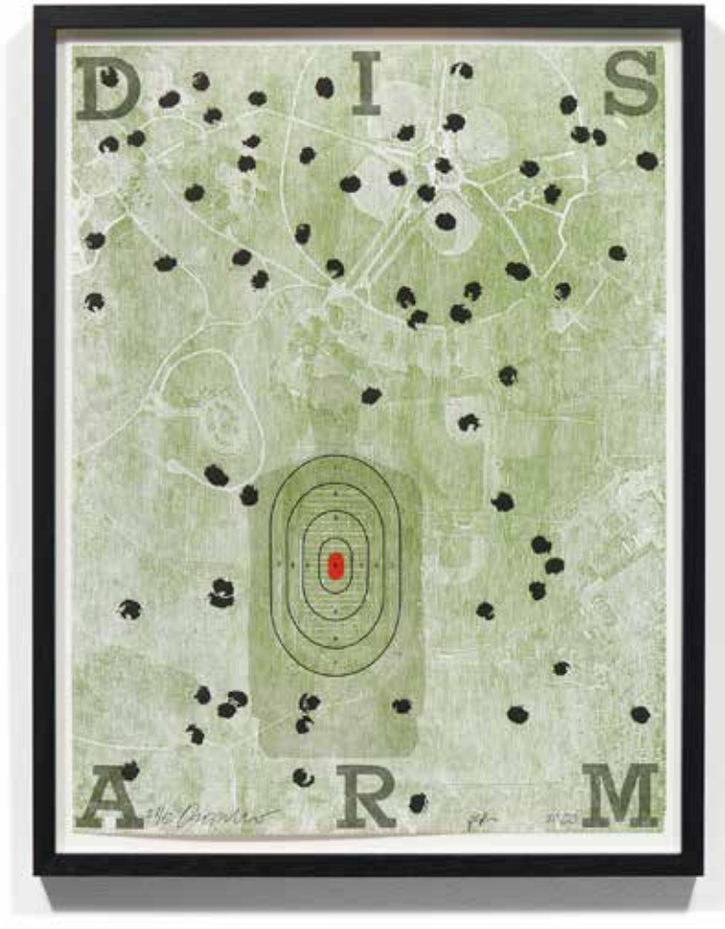
Haveahart, 2020
Deborah Oropallo
Have-a-heart traps, costumes, wig,
taxidermy bird, concrete stilettos, artificial apple,
deer hides, masks, wood, plastic, glass, acrylic paint
Dimensions variable
Snow White: 49 x 10 x 12 inches,
7 - Dwarfs: 24 x 7½ x 7½ inches each,
Mirror: 32 x 23 x 2 inches

Bound, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
Ceramic, steel meat hook, leather, resin
24 x 29 x 7 inches

Reflection 1–8, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
Resin or acrylic paint, decoy, steel mounts
Dimensions variable
This Installation: approximately 15 feet wide

On Contact, 2000
Deborah Oropallo
Iris print and silkscreen on canvas
93 x 69 inches
Collection: Rene and Veronica di Rosa Foundation

Naval Destroyer, 2016
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints with acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas
61 x 50 inches



DISARM, 2020
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Letterpress print from an engraved woodblock and polymer plate, with wood type and hand-painted Japanese watercolor on paper
Edition of 50
Printed by Mullowney Printing
Published by BOXBLUR
Sheet: 20 x 15 inches; Frame: 22 x 17 inches

The Wolf, 1993
Deborah Oropallo
Oil on canvas
86 x 64 inches

Classic Conversation 1–3, 2019
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontages: UV cured pigment prints on paper
43 x 33 inches each

RIGHT

Classic Conversation 2, 2019 (detail)
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontages: UV cured pigment prints on paper
43 x 33 inches

Beautiful Protest

by ALMA ROSA ALVAREZ

UPRISING

In *UPRISING,* moving stratocumulus clouds are the opening image. Their fluffiness suggests serenity, but only for some seconds. A storm is coming. Two statues intrude onto the center of the scene, and seconds later, at intervals of a beat, the images are overlapped by statues of similar physical and representational composition. The intrusions are symbolic of the way the real-life individuals memorialized in "white bronze" intruded into history, creating legacies of racial disparity, colonialism, and inequity.

Seconds later in the video, Deborah Oropallo, formally trained as a painter, and Andy Rappaport, a sound and visual artist, break up the predominance of gray through color, beautiful and enticing: blue and yellow harnesses, splotches of pinks balanced by rainbow-colored flags in corners. The landscape becomes an interplay between attraction and repulsion. The scene is cleared so that only the clouds remain.

As we contemplate the peacefulness, men astride horses materialize, speaking to a worldwide mythology of masculine power that imposes itself over others and overtakes. But only momentarily. Oropallo and Rappaport subvert this narrative by overlaying the initial images with subsequent images to the beat of something vaguely familiar: carousel music. However, this version is rendered unfamiliar through a slowing down of the melody and the addition of minor keys, "carousel music on acid" that, despite its strangeness, becomes the song we can't shake out of our heads.[1] Meanwhile, the color harnesses raise the statues, similar to the way horses rise up in a carousel ride. Like the images of statues in the earlier sequence of the video, the harnesses aim to lift these statues out of public memory.

George Floyd's Murder as Social Frame

On May 25, 2020, seventeen-year-old Darnella Frazier caught on film the callous murder of George Floyd. One police officer knelt on Floyd's neck for over nine minutes. Another engaged in crowd control, as people begged for the officer to stop kneeling. Simultaneously, that officer mocked Floyd as he begged, with his last breaths, for air and for his mother who had died two years earlier. The other two police officers on the scene did not intervene.[2] Floyd's murder served as a watershed moment for racial reckoning in the United States and worldwide.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Hong Kong, 2021
Deborah Oropallo
UV cured pigment print on paper with fire hose frame by Michael
48 x 36 inches
Edition of 1 + 2AP

Venezuela, 2021
Deborah Oropallo
UV cured pigment print on paper with fire hose frame by Michael
48 x 36 inches
Edition of 1 + 2AP

Portland, 2021
Deborah Oropallo
UV cured pigment print on paper with fire hose frame by Michael
48 x 36 inches
Edition of 1 + 2AP

Protests ensued. Some sources cite up to 26 million people protesting in the United States. According to conservative estimates, 15 million people protested[3], this despite the real threat of Coronavirus-19.

Oropallo's and Rappaport's collaborative works, *UPRISING, RECKONING,* and *REBELLION,* situate the viewer in protest, specifically the Black Lives Matter protests in response to George Floyd's murder. While 93% of Black Lives Matter protests were peaceful[4], it wasn't long before people worldwide began to see images of violence unfold. Three years after the Black Lives Matter protests, one protester remembers: She was fifteen. At the time, despite being underage, she thought of herself as an adult. She, and other youth stood at the front of the protest, toe-to-toe with law enforcement. The bandanas and medical masks, used as protection from COVID, were poor cover for what came next. She recalls the burning of her eyes, the tightness in her chest, the sensation of choking... and running, or at least trying to run. From her vantage point now as an adult, she is angry at being tear-gassed. "We were just kids," she says, bitterly.[5]

UPRISING, 2021
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Three 4k projected videos with 2 channel sound
Edition of 8 + 3AP
Running time: 9:33

Carousel, 2021
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured acrylic prints on 3 panels
Printed by Magnolia Editions
Edition of 1 + 2AP
72 x 128 inches

Oropallo's and Rappaport's work in *REBELLION* balances the violence of the Floyd protests with the resilience of protestors. Against a black backdrop are five frames with ever-changing figures that stand in defiance to the clouds of gray smoke curling around them, smoke from exploded cans of tear gas used to control, disperse, dismantle. However, these protestors are not running. They are not crumpled on the floor, reacting to the irritation of the mucous membranes in their noses, eyes, and lungs.[6] The protestors stand solidly, committed. In the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests lasted two years, ten months, and four weeks.[7] Across the country, in Portland, Oregon, BLM protests lasted two hundred days.[8] Resilience. At the same time, Oropallo and Rappaport do not want us to think of the protestors as people unharmed. The violence experienced was real. Sound—erratic breathing, the type done when wearing a gas mask, or when struggling for air, permeates the installation, to the point that the viewer takes on the belabored protestors' breaths. For a moment, the viewer, unconsciously, is in solidarity.

Oropallo's and Rappaport's images of Black Lives Matter protestors are given a place in the recent history of global protests, as protestors from around the globe emerge in the installation's frames. Both artists are well-versed in global protests. Their work has featured Chinese, Iranian, and Israeli protests, just to name a few. Black Lives Matter is given a global solidarity.

RECKONING, 2020
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Single channel video with 2 channel sound
Edition of 8 + 3AP
Running time: 13:32

China, 2023
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print, acrylic paint on canvas
44 x 74 inches

Israel, 2023
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print, acrylic paint on canvas
44 x 74 inches

Iran, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Single channel video; 2 channel sound
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: continuous loop
This image: Wood frame by Michael Goldin

Another aspect of protest was the removal of statues, especially those that celebrated Confederate, racist, and/or colonizing figures. Prior to Floyd's murder, people in the U.S. had engaged in statue removal, primarily through legal channels, notably after the Charleston Church shooting (2015) and the Unite the Right Rally (2017). However, formal statue removal petitions often involved arduous processes that yielded inaction. From Floyd's murder to October 2020, over a hundred statues memorializing the Confederacy and colonizers were removed or relocated.[9] "White bronze," a cheap alternative to marble, was used to mass produce statues in foundries in the North in the early twentieth century. Often, statues reinforcing Jim Crow ideologies were shipped to the South. The inferior materials and poor pedestal placement made the toppling of statues by protestors with harnesses a challenging, but not impossible task.[10] The removal of statues, of course, was not without controversy, particularly for individuals wanting to uphold the status quo. Oropallo's and Rappaport's work in both *RECKONING* and *UPRISING* speaks to this historical moment of protest.

REBELLION, 2021
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Edition of 8 + 3AP
Running time: continuous loop
This image: Installation view with projections

Ukraine, 2023
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print, acrylic paint on canvas
44 x 74 inches

An Imperative Against Image Overload

> I touch you tenderly 2,617 times a day. My sleek black screen, my lover. In times of anxiety, my caress turns into furtive fumbling—I will touch you over 5000 times a day. Are you there? In my bag, my backpack, my pocket? Sometimes, when I touch you, I go all the way, unlocking you at least 96 times a day. On bored days, sad days, 160. When you open to me, I am seduced by a smorgasbord of images, images I linger on for a few seconds. By the end of one of our times together, I am thoughtlessly scrolling, my brain experiencing image overload. I close my apps down, until we connect again... ten minutes later.[11]

Our brains can process an image in 13 milliseconds,[12] 60,000 times faster than words.[13] The medial temporal lobe, in concert with other areas of the brain, is the site where visual images are bound, encoded, and made into memory traces.[14] As humans, we can retain images within our brains better than words. But what happens when we have a proliferation of images? In 2021-2022, more photos were taken than in the entire world history of photography.[15] In 2023, approximately 2.1 billion images were uploaded daily on Facebook.[16] In a world that constantly produces images, images are easily supplanted by the next series of images. They are forgotten, and thus rendered almost invisible.

Oropallo and Rappaport engage video and sound production technologies, they are troubled by how the images we consume on our phone screens can easily be dismissed.[17] The average phone screen is anywhere from 5.8 to 6.2 inches. Human life, regardless of its state or stage, is physically minimized. One of Oropallo's and Rappaport's responses is to use 8.5 feet tall by 15 feet wide screens—sometimes multiple screens that total as much as 45 feet in length. As a viewer becomes immersed in the installation, the images, because of the scale, are difficult to ignore. Moreover, the images themselves, their sequencing, the timing intervals, and the addition of sounds make viewing Oropallo's and Rappaport's collaborations a multi-sensory and unforgettable experience.

Oropallo's and Rappaport's work is a concerted effort to break the obsolescence of particular images that ought to matter to us as members of humanity. Their process includes combing daily through the internet, almost obsessively. This has led them to sometimes find images that eventually get censored by governments, as was the case with images of the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong, images of the White Paper Protest in China, and images of the 2023 Israeli Judicial Reform Protests. Often, particularly in relation to images of events in the United States, they are countering the ways these are framed in neutral language that detracts from the decidedly non-neutral event unfolding.[18] In an installation, anywhere from five hundred to a thousand discrete images are carefully placed in "sequences of painting."[19] In this sense, Oropallo's and Rappaport's work becomes a type of recuperation, not only of images, but of the emotional and the moral spaces occupied by images.

France, 2023
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print, acrylic paint on canvas
44 x 74 inches each

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14. Cheryl L. Grady et al, "Neural Correlates of the Episodic Encoding of Pictures and Words," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America,* March 3, 1998, https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.95.5.2703 .

15. JasenkaG, "How Many Pictures? Photo Statistics That Will Blow You Away," June 28, 2023, https://www.lightstalking.com/photo-statistics/#site-content .

16. Matic Broz, "How many pictures are there (2023): Statistics, trends, and forecasts," *Photutorial,* November 24, 2023, https://photutorial.com/photos-statistics/ .

17. Deborah Oropallo, Personal Interview, August 18, 2023.

18. Oropallo, Interview.

19. Rappaport, Interview.

LIFE CYCLE, 2019–2023
Deborah Oropallo
Single channel video; sound, speaker, projector, plexiglas in metal pail; plastic mil crates
33 x 13 x 13 inches
Edition: 1 + 2AP
Running time: 5:03

113, 2019
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
7 channel video with 2 channel sound
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: 5:15
This installation: 6 broadcast monitors, one 4k projector and projection screen, stereo speakers, two custom video controllers, six school desks and chairs

Bo Peep, 2018
Deborah Oropallo
Aluminum, glass, sheep's wool, costume, wig, concrete stilettos, staff, Corian
80 x 45 x 18 inches

Cloning Bo Peep, 2010
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print with acrylic paint on canvas
90 x 67 inches

Swine, 2013
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print on canvas
69 x 57 inches

Heritage Herd, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
Set of six chairs designed by Giancarlo Piretti
and Anonima Castelli, Italy (Vintage 1960s)
Custom upholstery in cow, deer, safety orange, ostrich,
calf, and meat print; beechwood, leather, aluminum
30 x 22 x 22 inches each

Fowl Weather, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
11 ceramic ducks, resin, wire, lead, steel hook, ash
75 x 19 inches
Above: Detail

86, 2023
Deborah Oropallo and Michael Goldin
Rawhide, ceramic, thread, plastic
Installation dimensions variable
Boots: 15 x 14 x 13 inches, Stool: 15 x 12 x 12 inches
Installation dimensions: variable

Cattle Class, 2013
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print on canvas
80 x 60 inches

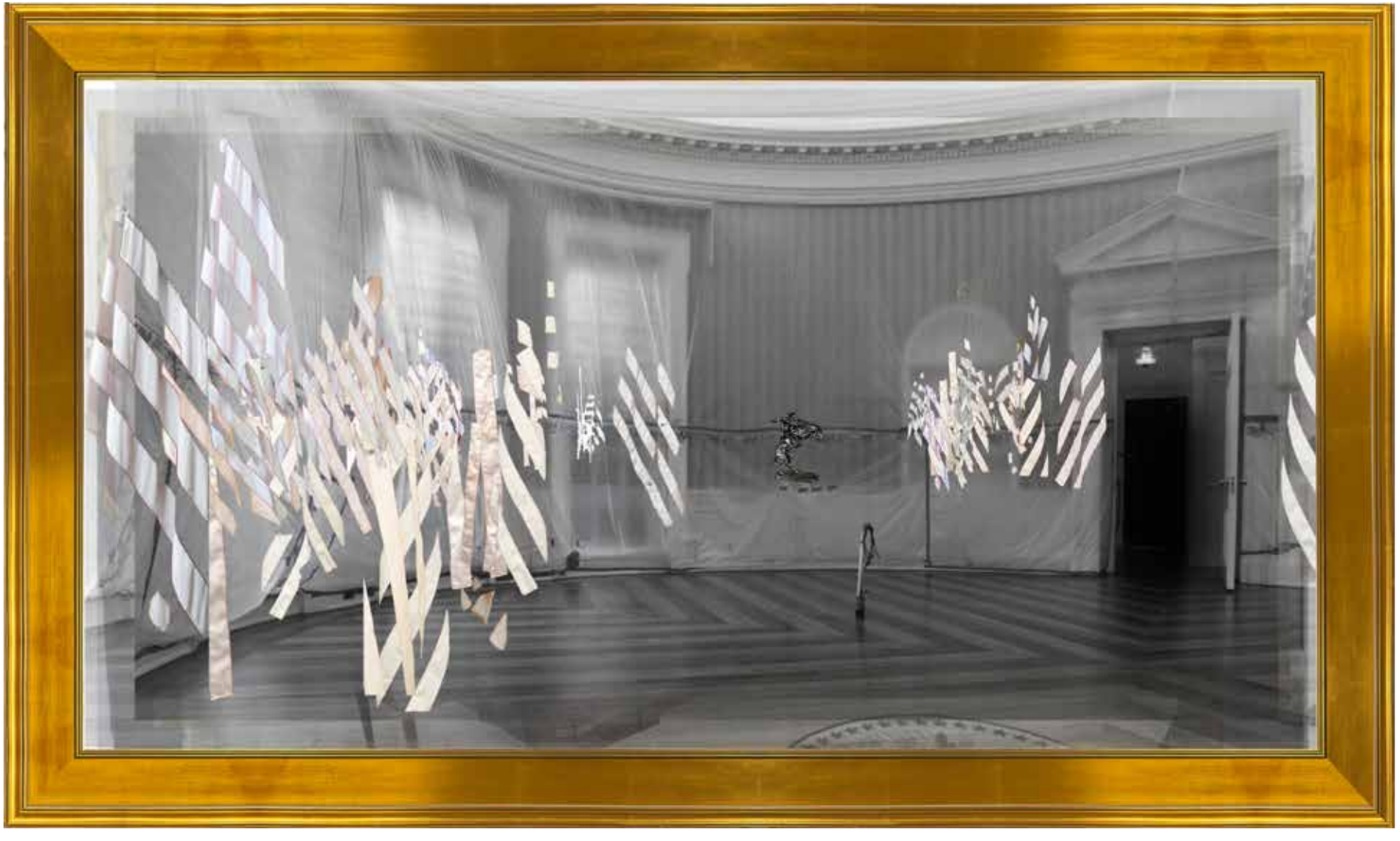
Milk Men, 2013
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print on canvas
62 x 62 inches

Tit Tat (one), 2014
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment on paper
22 x 34 inch

Tit Tat (two), 2014
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment on paper
22 x 34 inch

Tit Tat (three), 2014
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment on paper
22 x 34 inch

Ample, 2013
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print with acrylic paint on canvas
71 x 94 inches



ABOVE AND RIGHT

OVAL O, 2018
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Single channel video with 2 channel sound
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: 6:43
This image: Wood frame by Michael Goldin

Removing Red, 2018
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints on paper
50 x 80 inches

MOUTHPIECE, 2019
Deborah Oropallo and Andy Rappaport
Single channel video; 2 channel sound; HD monitor;
gold frame: 16½ x 12 x 1¾ inches
Edition: 8 + 3AP
Running time: 2:16

0.45, 2016
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints,
acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas
70 x 60 inches

Once Upon A Time

by MARIA PORGES

> These works are meant to be dark, fractured, edgy, sexy and funny. Dangerous and wicked, the girls have turned into women in a post-feminist age, and the wolf is on the run. —D. Oropallo

Some years ago, Deborah Oropallo was asked to give a talk about her work to a group of students. Trained as a painter, she had enjoyed considerable success in that medium, often combining text or symbols with representational images. Later, she'd begun working intensively with digital processes, creating monumental images of industrial subjects she'd photographed around her neighborhood.

In 2000, she started experimenting with digital layering, superimposing photographs of female figures in various states of saucy undress over classical painted portraits of statesmen and aristocrats. Matching poses and scale, she exploited their peculiar congruencies as a way of commenting about power and control. In a suite of images exploring the role and presence of cowgirls in the hyper-masculine setting of the rodeo, she montaged elements in an increasingly radical and fragmented way.

For her lecture to the group of students, Oropallo made a slide deck, demonstrating the computer-driven processes she used to create her pieces. As she watched the presentation herself, she was enchanted by the gradual transformation as enacted through a succession of images—and, even more importantly, by the way those images looked as projections on a screen, the light coming through them. Soon afterwards, she began experimenting with building longer sequences: essentially, her first time-based works, in which one image fully morphed into another. Sometimes, they gradually filled the screen; sometimes, they disappeared, leaving behind implacable ghosts.

From the beginning, as she has noted, this process has been incredibly time-consuming. In some ways, it resembles the frame-by-frame construction of early hand-drawn animation. Each successive image is extracted from its source—somewhere on the internet, whether news footage, advertising or various archives—and then manipulated painstakingly in Photoshop. The process of aligning elements is exacting and meticulous, as are the decisions about what to include and what will fade away.

Ash, 2015
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print on panel
Printed at Magnolia Editions
Edition variée: 1/1 + 2AP
58 x 48 inches

Ocean Blue, 2016
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment print on panel
Printed by Magnolia Editions
Edition variée 1/1 + 2AP
58 x 48 inches

Oropallo's video works have explored a number of topics, including politics, pollution and climate change. Three of them, however, are clearly related to the series of superimposed figures that instigated her shift in medium, as well as to particular themes and subjects she has addressed since the late '80s. In *WHITE AS SNOW* (2016), *FLATLINE* (2017) and *WOLF* (2019), Oropallo draws our attention to the strange transformation that costumes have undergone, in part because of the immense market created by internet commerce. Shopping with her daughter for a trick-or-treating Halloween outfit one year, she was astonished to see the 'sexy' version of fairytale figures like Snow White or Red Riding Hood, intended for teens and adults alike. Online, she researched further, discovering that 'sexy' nurse costumes constitute a genre all their own—one with almost infinite variations, many made of vinyl or rubber. (There were around 200 such 'hot nurse' costumes for sale on line when she started working with these images. At this writing, there are thousands.)

Soon after Oropallo began exploring this online marketplace, she was introduced to a different, yet intimately related fantasy realm: costume play, better known as *cosplay*. As a teenager, her daughter was drawn to this world, in which individuals dress up as characters sourced from movies, TV series, books, comic books, video games, bands, anime, or manga. Cosplayers go to great lengths to replicate the details of a character's appearance, making or buying costumes that sometimes embody an imaginary avatar of a fictional character, such as Snow White transformed into a powerful warrior princess armed with bow or sword.

Accompanying her daughter to conventions, Oropallo was fascinated by the extent to which some cosplayers were essentially taking control of the narrative for themselves, transforming their role-playing into an act of personal power. The R-rated costumes she had discovered online were clearly intended to function as straightforward vehicles for adult fantasies. In contrast, Oropallo's sequencing of Little Red or Snow White get-ups tell a more nuanced, complicated story. Starting with infant attire, she takes viewers through children's versions of the costumes, familiar in their iconic details: the vivid cape or bright yellow skirt, black MaryJane shoes or red hair ribbon, that segue into startlingly revealing styles meant for teenagers—and then to adult-sized rubber and vinyl fetish wear. She holds our eyes on the screen long enough

American Puppet, 2016
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints, acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas
60 x 50 inches

Snow White, 1994
Deborah Oropallo
Oil and paper on canvas
96 x 69 inches

RIGHT

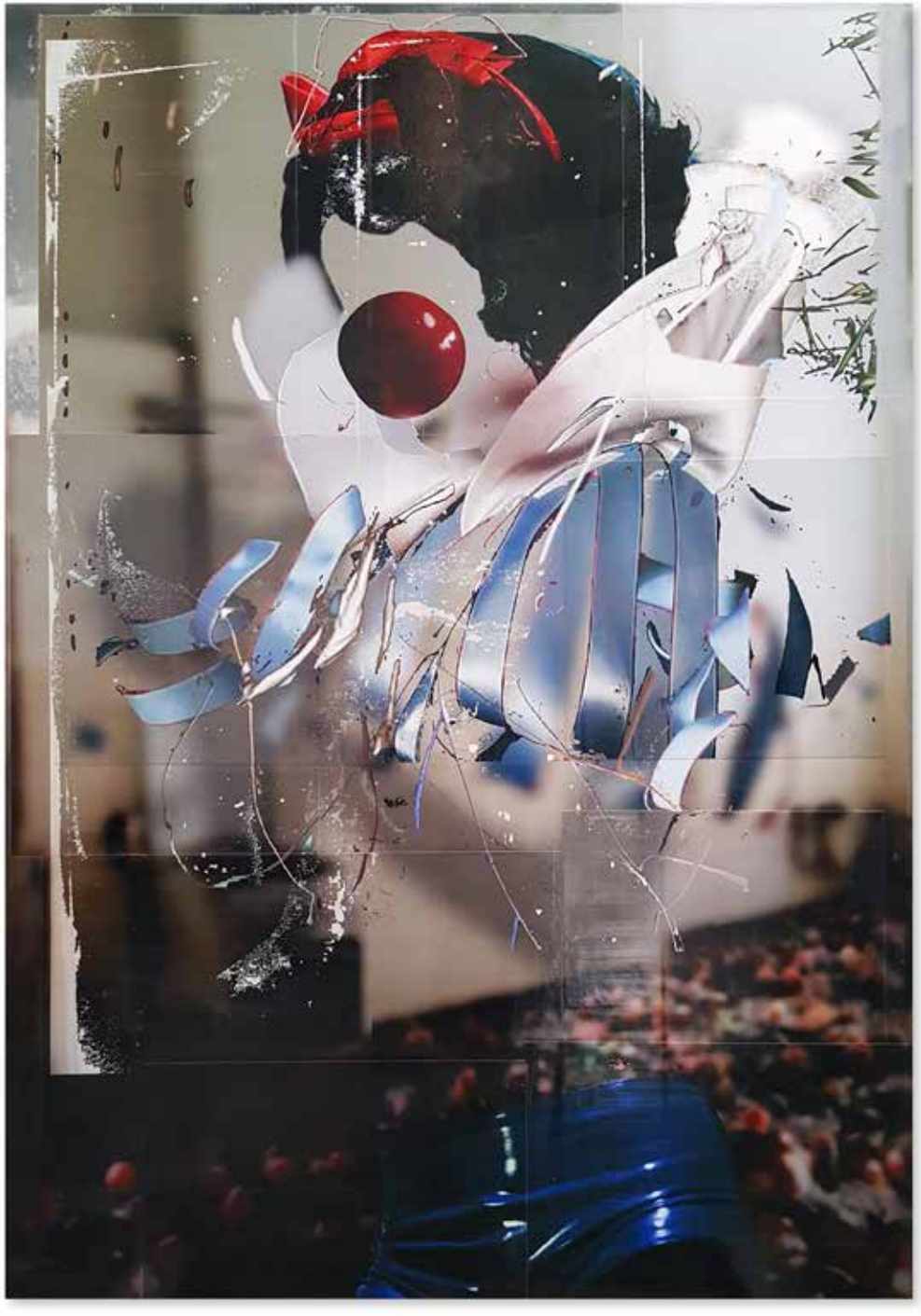
Bad Apples, 2016
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured
pigment prints, acrylic paint on
paper mounted on canvas
68 x 48 inches

to make her intention clear. She means to show us that these symbols of capitalism, desire, sex, and power are both unsettling—and highly subversive.

Like memories re-pictured and made visible, images stack one on top of another on the screen. They are related, and there is a suggestion of the passage of time, but they change so rapidly from one to the next that there is no time to think your way through the sequence. You can only allow yourself, eyes opened wide, to absorb what you are seeing. A fairytale costume for a baby or little girl suddenly morphs into a sharply-sexualized version of itself, featuring a lowcut front and a short skirt, maybe rubber and latex, high-heeled boots. At the end, white returns, and then the parade of disembodied costumes starts all over again.

> It is tempting to believe that people feel always physically the same and that they look different only because the cut of their garments changes—to subscribe to the notion of a universal, unadorned mankind that is universally naturally behaved when naked. But art proves that nakedness is not universally experienced and perceived any more than the clothes are... both the perception and the self-perception of nudity are dependent on a sense of clothing—understood through the medium of a visual convention. —Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*

In *Bell the Cat*, Oropallo's 2017 exhibition at Catharine Clark Gallery, a series of montaged/ collaged images on canvas continued her exploration of the legacies of gender and power, focused through the lens of fairy tales. But these "morality plays, meant to scare girls into being good" (the artist's words) took on a new potency and a different kind of urgency in the wake of the 2016 election. Attacks on women's rights and progressive causes began immediately and accelerated as time passed.



WHITE AS SNOW, 2016
Deborah Oropallo and Jeremiah Franklin
Single-channel video; editing and
sound design by Jeremiah Franklin
Edition of 8 + 2AP
Running time: 3:00

In this sociopolitical context, the video *White as Snow's* debut in this show seems especially significant, signaling Oropallo's desire to expand beyond the boundaries of traditional media and to find a way to voice increasingly-urgent concerns with contemporary issues. As the piece begins, strains of an orchestral arrangement of songs from the 1938 Disney film "Snow White" can be heard. A newborn baby girl, wearing the character's familiar yellow and blue dress, appears on the blank screen—only to be subsumed beneath another, slightly older baby, who herself immediately disappears beneath another. Each little Snow is accompanied by a Technicolor-red apple: the vehicle used by the evil Queen to poison her rival, here presented as a costume accessory. Soon, a constellation of fruit hovers around the accumulating images of older and older girls. Bits of dialogue from the Disney movie are woven through the music like a sampled bit of song—phrases like "but you don't know what I can do"... and, "what do you do when things go wrong?" Sound effects (twittering birds, the hoots of the train the dwarves used in their mining) repeat, create a confusing aural landscape as full and complicated as the white background to the costumed figures is empty and blank.

As a girlish voice begins to sing the words to "Whistle While you Work," toothsome teenagers in increasingly-brief costumes appear, and then, suddenly, women—in six inch heels and

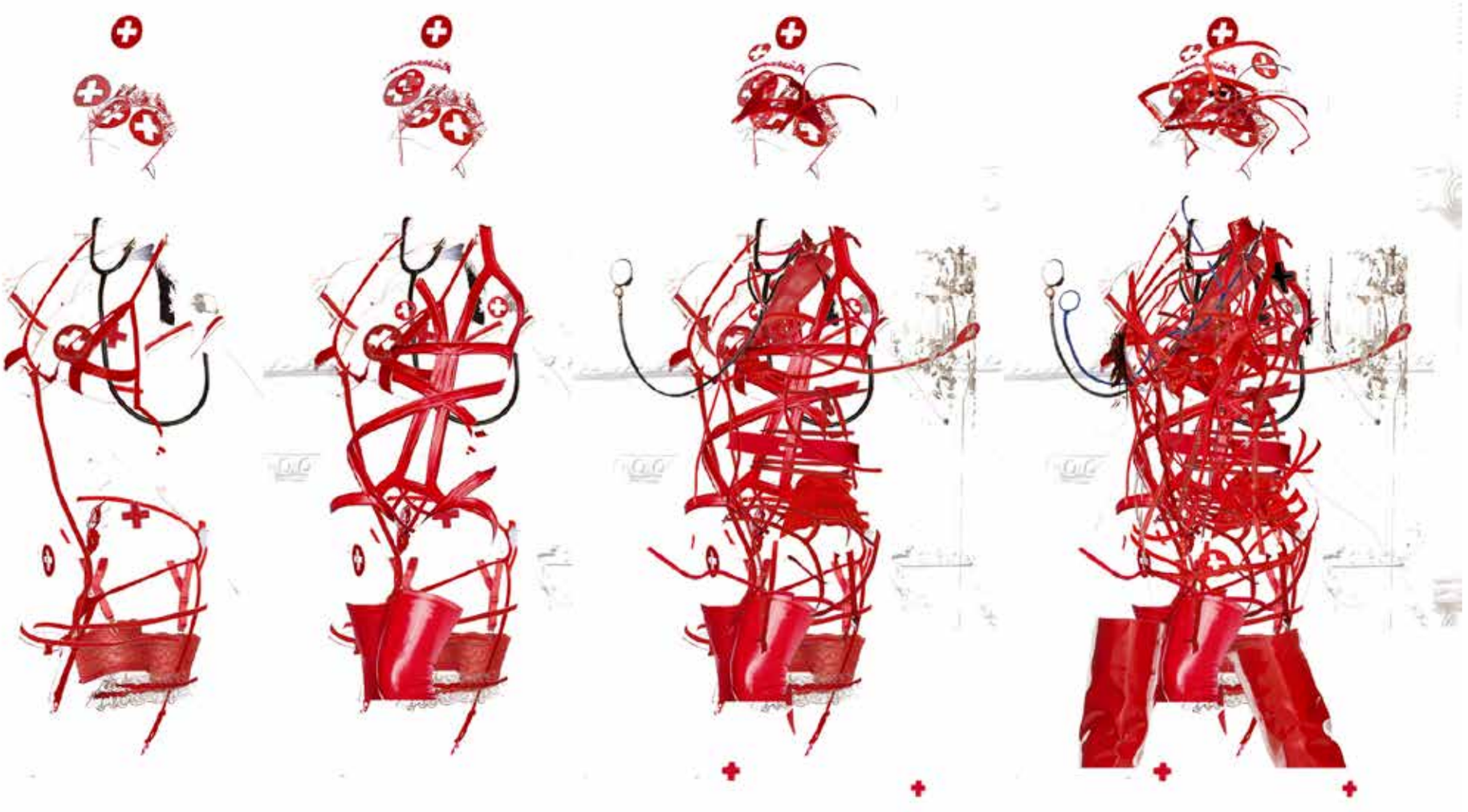
provocative versions of the (short, tight) yellow skirt and blue bodice. There is still a cloud of floating apples, replete with biblical implications of fallen virtue. These women, with their seductive makeup and vixenish smiles, seem fully capable of flinging the fruit back in the face of any enemy. More ominous than coy, they are unsettling reminders of a world in which beauty has often been a woman's primary source of power—as well as her pleasure. Watching the video cycle, from infant to girl to woman, recalls Naomi Wolf's defiant contention that "the enemy is not lipstick, but guilt itself... we deserve lipstick, if we want it, AND free speech; we deserve to be sexual AND serious--or whatever we please; we are entitled to wear cowboy boots to our own revolution."

In *FLATLINE*, the succession of images that appear against the white background screen are of 'sexy nurse' outfits, emerging and then fading in a steady, rhythmic flow, accompanied by the unmistakable sound of an amplified heartbeat. The alarmingly brief outfits—digitally separated, this time, from the bodies that might wear them—offer one faintly-medical variation after another. White bits are elaborated with red and black crosses, straps, belts and binding, each costume different and at the same time immediately recognizable for what it is. Throughout, Oropallo allows the red details to accumulate, becoming a field of vivid bloody scarlet against which, the brief white garments appear and disappear. A shadowy background of sorts slowly accumulates as well—a bit of architecture, a landscape seen out a dirty window.

Near the end, the heartbeat gives way to the sounds of an operating theater, familiar to all of us from countless hours of watching hospital dramas. A succession of ghostly, all white uniforms/ costumes gradually covers the red stain, as the sounds fade away. It's an endless loop of sex and death, desire and loss, framed against the ongoing struggle for a woman's right to control her own body.

WOLF, revised and completed in 2019, invokes elements of both of the previous works and goes beyond them. As it begins, we hear the overture from Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, but this time the screen doesn't begin as a blank canvas. Instead, a stack of soiled mattresses fills the foreground—reminders, perhaps, of Grandma's bed, the site of the story's climactic scene. A rapid succession of costumed babies and girls appears, suspended in midair above the pile; they are faceless, their bodies appearing for a split second before sinking back into a mass of accumulating red-riding-hood that grows ever larger. The figures do as well, seemingly advancing toward us across the ground of the dirty mattress ticking on their black Mary Janes.

The outfits are storybook-demure until suddenly they are not—a plangent reminder of the terrifying way daughters morph, seemingly overnight, from little girls to women. The music suddenly becomes ominous, and the sound of adolescent panting becomes audible. Is she running, the wolf in pursuit? Or is something else taking place... something as adult as the



ABOVE AND RIGHT

FLATLINE, 2017
Deborah Oropallo and Jeremiah Franklin
Single-channel video; editing and sound design by Jeremiah Franklin
Edition: 8 + 2AP
Running time: 2:48

garter belts and increasingly-kinky looking rubber and latex bondage wear imply? In the last seconds, the costumes are menacing, masked and booted, entirely red and black.

As the video ends, a flayed wolf skin suddenly appears, superimposed over the last hooded figure. A spatter of red drops spills violently across the screen and the music stops. Repeated viewing reveals that red-gloved fingers hold the animal's head, as if in triumph. Who, this image asks, needs the woodsman? Not this of Little Red.

In her videos, Oropallo reimagines and refashions our archetypal tales, shaping them to speak to the needs of our time. As the #metoo movement has demonstrated, women can and will demand the justice that they deserve, owning the roles they have been made to play and finding their own power. And for the next generation: the young women shaped by Katniss Everdeen's courage and stamina, or Hermione Grainger's brilliance—maybe the stories they tell their little girls will have a different kind of ending.

Shifting Shapes and Beating Hearts

The Videos of Deborah Oropallo

by MONIQUE JENKINSON

"She closed the window on the wolves' threnody and took off her scarlet shawl, the colour of poppies, the colour of sacrifices, the colour of her menses, and, since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid."
—Angela Carter, *The Company of Wolves*

Deborah Oropallo has ceased to be afraid. Or perhaps she has gathered her courage, her heartfelt lifeforce, in the face of fear, to confront the dark forest of her times. The root of "courage" is "coeur," or "heart," a quality that, though Oropallo's work loves to move toward abstraction, remains beating through it.

Oropallo's video works *WHITE AS SNOW* (2016), *WOLF* (2019), and *DIRTY* (2021) base themselves on fairy tales whose purpose is to warn the young and innocent not to be taken in by shape-shifting tricksters. But Oropallo's videos are themselves shapeshifters, and they delight in that quality.

Oropallo speaks of her growing body of video work as painting and indeed all of the hallmarks of modern and contemporary painting (visible brushstrokes, evidence of the artist's hand, palpable layers, reminders of materiality) are present in her video practice. She uses the medium of video (its flaws, glitches, and ghosts) to render the layers and depth inherent in paint. In doing so, she creates a new medium while referencing an old one. I think it is also valuable to see Deborah Oropallo's video work as choreography, as participating in a form that not only bases itself on time but depends on and glories in it.

WHITE AS SNOW (2016) begins in a whiteout, soon relieved by the introductory notes of Jeremiah Franklin's soundtrack, culled from the lush, sentimental old Hollywood orchestration of Disney's 1937 *Snow White*. On the bright, tight "ta-da" of an oboe note, appears a sleeping infant, so new as to appear practically larval. She wears a tiny Snow White costume, her forearms posed perversely on a presumably poisoned apple which obscures her lower body. The apple is nearly as big as her bald head, which itself is adorned with a banded red bow. As the music skips along, another little baby Snow White appears, layered on top of the first, and then another, and another, each one a little bigger, a little older than the one underneath. We glimpse a trompe l'oeil Mary Jane bootie, a toothless smile. The baby sits up, sturdy and chubby. She stands, a toddler in shoes and knee socks. Then she is a sassy child, posed with arm akimbo. In layer after layer, we watch Snow grow, always accompanied by

Snow Blind, 2016
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints, acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas
60 x 50 inches

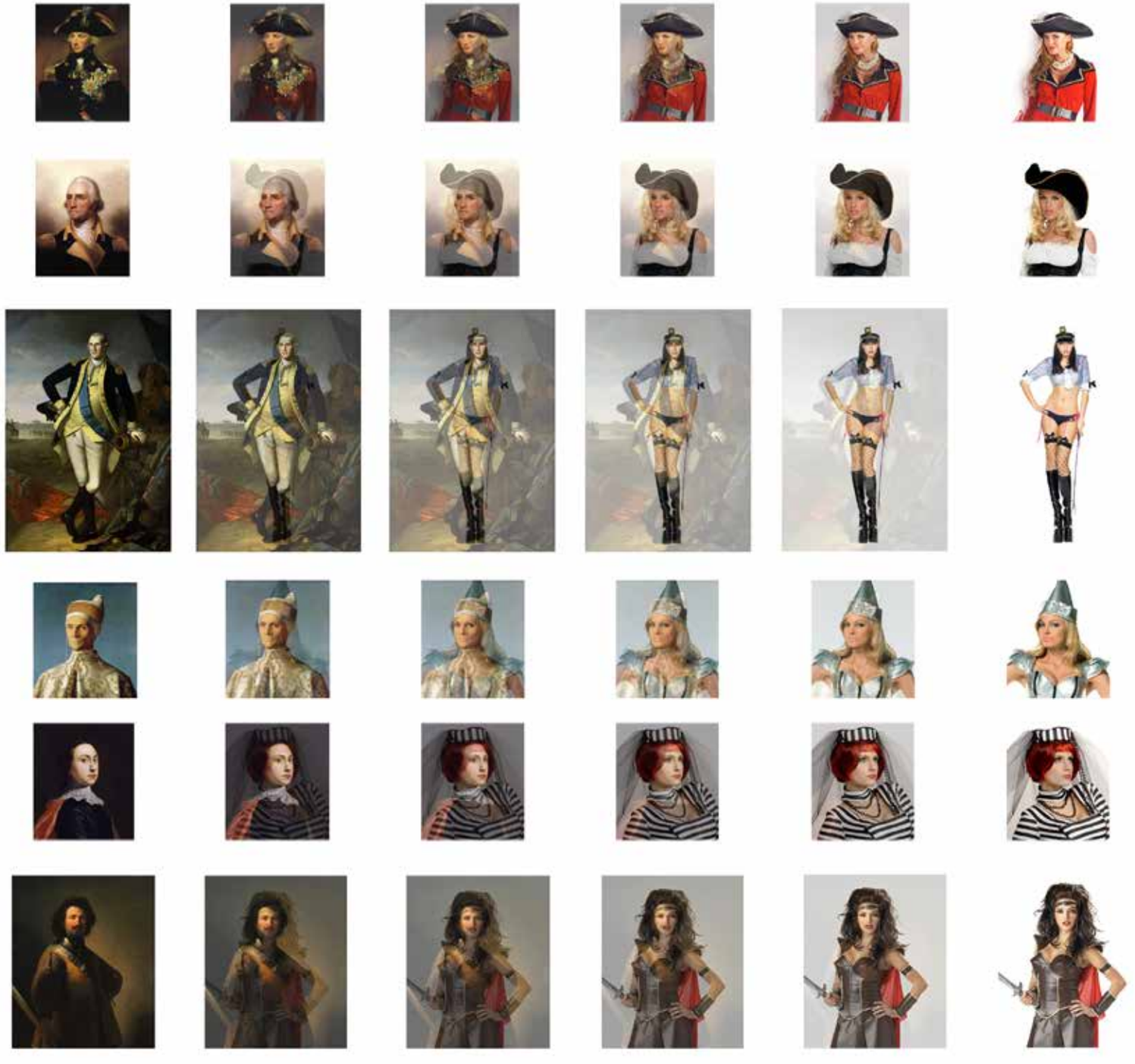
an apple, her deadly accessory. We remain aware of the image underneath the one that dominates. In this successive accumulation of aggressively-gendered girl children, the costumes become more elaborate, involving more of Snow White's cartoon signifiers: a bigger red bow, black wig, yellow laced-up bodice, and high-collared cape. The apple proliferates, appearing in a new spot with each successive figure, but its form remains unchanged. The Snow Whites pile up: older child, preteen, teenager... *WHITE AS SNOW* truly renders the acts of magical transformation that parents always witness, watching as babies grow into teens before their very eyes.

Try as they might to avoid them, parents of young children must contend with fairy tales; the magical past encroaches on the quotidian present—morbid, violent parables collide with Disney's commercialized cuteness. The particular era, the early aughts, in which Oropallo was raising her young daughter was the high renaissance of the Disney Princess. Oropallo composts this mess, this pile of faces, feelings, limbs, stories, and costumes, into funny, gutsy abstraction.

Soon our Snow White is an adult woman. The pace of images increases to a double-time cascade, as if Oropallo herself cannot keep up. Franklin's soundtrack grows distorted. Now our heroine is Sexy Snow White. The dresses get shorter, the accessories turn into lingerie, the finale, a fully-covered latex fetish version of the icon, complete with gas mask. Childish games and dress-up have turned into adult kink.

Children play innocently with identity, power, and the limits of their senses and imaginations. Adult play sometimes engages those games in complex ways that can appear sinister but often function to disarm fraught dynamics of power. Writer Dan Savage contextualizes S/M fetish play in the face of moral pearl-clutching as just "cops and robbers for grownups with your pants off." Oropallo's work manages to hold the innocent goodwill of that statement in the same container as fear, violence, and misogyny. These videos create a site to confront the story through play, to transform and reclaim power.

At the beginning of the Grimm's version of the tale, Snow White is a seven-year-old. By the time the prince rescues her from her glass coffin five pages later, she is a marriageable maiden. How much actual time passes over the course of the tale? In *WHITE AS SNOW*, Deborah Oropallo uses her wry visual wit to grapple with this unsettling question. With a sense of edgy, dark humor, and the economy of imagistic discourse, she forces us, and perhaps herself, to contend with the squeamishness of simultaneity: the infantilized adult and the sexualized child, innocence and wariness, the fact that that every sexy lady was once a baby.



GUISE, 2008
Deborah Oropallo
and Jeremiah Franklin
Single channel video;
editing and sound
design by Jeremiah
Franklin
Edition: 8 + 2AP
Running time: 4:16

GUISE, 2008
Deborah Oropallo and Jeremiah Franklin
Single channel video; editing and sound design by Jeremiah Franklin
Edition: 8 + 2AP
Running time: 4:16
This image: Wood frame by Michael Goldin

Oropallo's videos connect to the body of work in her 2007 show *GUISE*. For the pigment prints in *GUISE*, Oropallo began with eighteenth and nineteenth-century portraiture: images of kings, presidents, admirals—men of ostensible courage and power. Over these (or under them, it is impossible to tell), she layered photographs of women in cheap sexy costumes. "Sexy" here does not connote a system of value concerning allure, but a type, almost a brand, which anyone who has participated in American Halloween in the last three decades has witnessed—sexy sailor, sexy pirate, sexy Louis XIV.

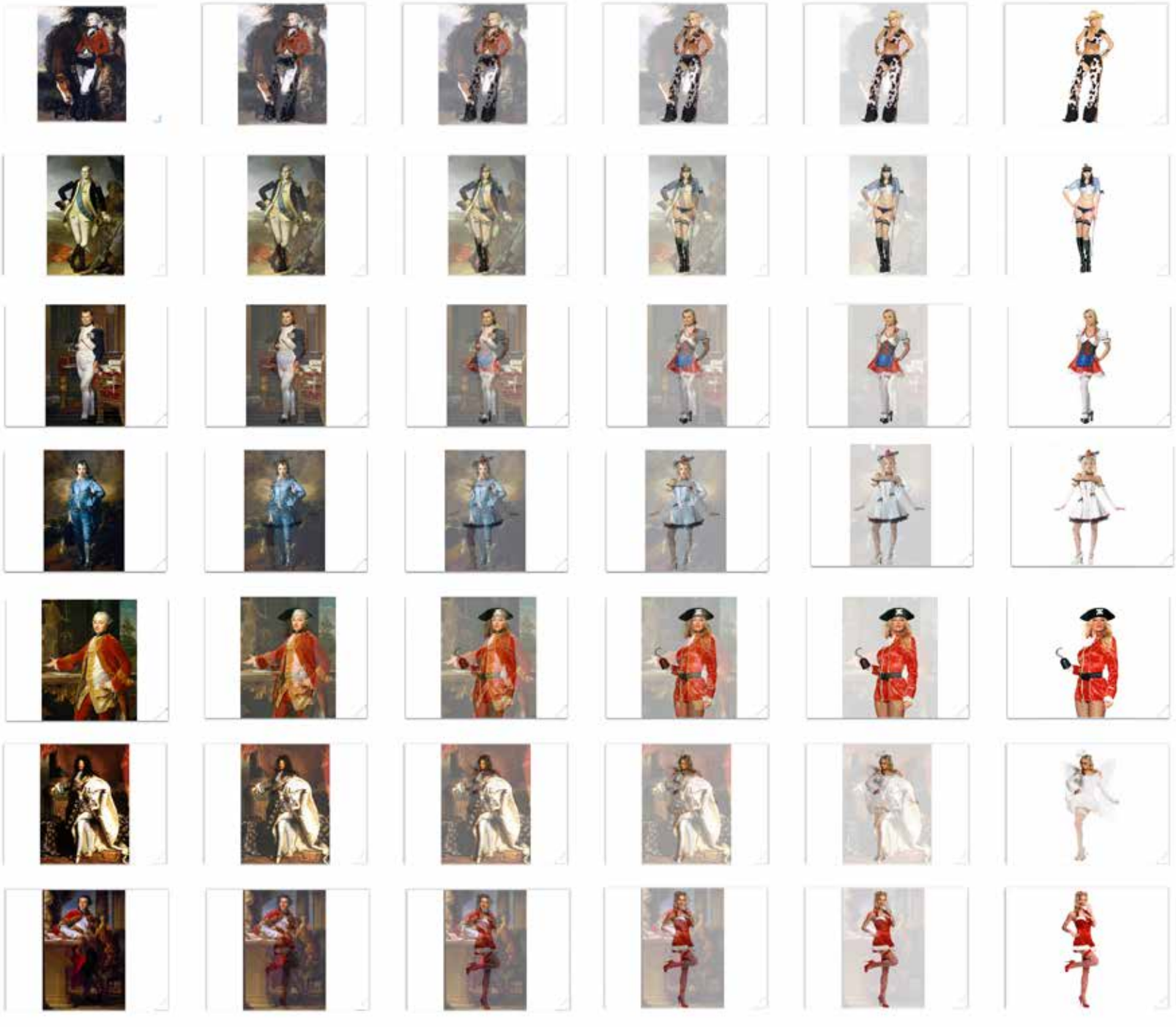
Oropallo created these works while searching for Halloween costumes for her daughter, finding a world of online cosplay for fantasists of all ages. Halloween is the drag queen's gateway drug, when transformation is the order of the day, a time when fairy tales not only inspire costumes, but also influence the psyche, when we imagine that the veil, between the magical and the real, between the dead and the living, between all binaries, is thin.

In these works, Oropallo puts forth a subtle, elegant gender play. She reveals, through layering, the astonishing similarity between the silhouettes and faces of the anonymous website models and their respectably painted male counterparts. Louis XIV's finely-turned court shoe is almost indistinguishable from the garish platform, the face of Napoleon and that of the model superimposed on it blend almost seamlessly with only a misplaced eyebrow here, a faint mustache or extra nostril there.

PREVIOUS PAGE

Left: *Napoleon*, 2007
Deborah Oropallo
Pigment printed on Hahnemuhle 310GSM
Edition of 10
Printed and published by Gallery 16
60 x 40 inches

Right: *George*, 2007
Deborah Oropallo
Pigment printed on Hahnemuhle 310GSM
Edition of 10
Printed and published by Gallery 16
60 x 40 inches



In some of the *GUISE* works, the male image dominates, making it legible as conventional portraiture, offering only glimpses of the nearly-concealed, stealth femme. In others, the catalog model's stripper platforms, fishnet stockings and decolletage stick out like, well, a whore in church. The works play with legibility and legitimacy, gender and class, contemporaneity and history. Some of the works invite us to engage discernment and imagination to grant visibility to the female figures, others demand that we acknowledge their brash and trashy presence. Oropallo's juxtaposition demotes official masculine uniform to drag and cosplay, and simultaneously elevates the sexy models in their tawdry polyester outfits to the status of the heroic men, positing their labor as equally worthy of commemoration.

Oropallo's acts of layering touch on what drag and burlesque parlance calls "the reveal," an onstage quick costume change that creates a punchline, troubles an identity or shifts a story. Painting and other static media can capture a fragment of a moment, but only time-based media can show the process, the transformation, the reveal in its entirety.

WHITE AS SNOW, *WOLF* and *DIRTY* build on the *Guise* works, furthering Oropallo's use of layering and accretion of image by placing it in the time-based medium of video. By limiting her cosplay images to classic, enduring fairy tale iconography, she collides online contemporaneity with myth and archetype, deepening and widening the sense in which these works are time-based. Oropallo makes us watch as the works unfold over time, but also makes us keenly aware of the historic time to which they respond.

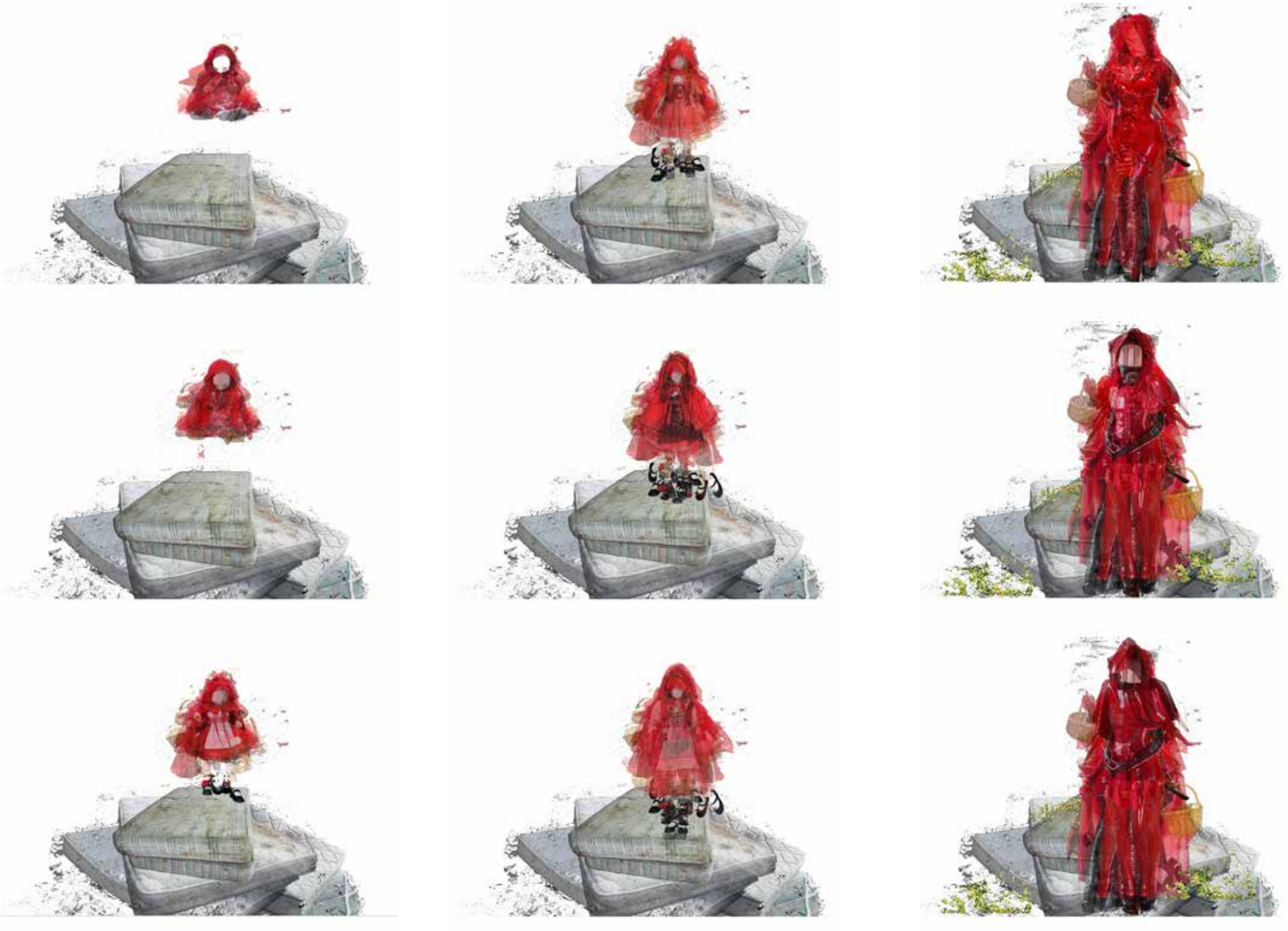
WOLF (2019) continues the exploration of fairy tale heroines and returns Deborah Oropallo to some of her earliest painterly inspiration, *Little Red Riding Hood*. If *WHITE AS SNOW* retains a layer of Disney cuteness, *Wolf* deepens the dread, not unlike Angela Carter's dark literary meditations on the same subject. *Wolf* sets up a sinister scene, with a stack of filthy mattresses standing in for the grandmother's bed of the fairy tale but also evoking the abandoned houses—meth dens and torture hideouts—of contemporary horror, where the predators are not lupine, but human. Into this scene, marches our heroine.

Again Oropallo digs up a bonanza of found images of online catalog models in costumes, starting with a crawling baby, to trace the development of an archetype. This time, however, she removes their faces, leaving a void framed by Little Red's iconic hood, which stands in for the character.

Here we also see a refinement of the choreographic qualities of Oropallo's work, an awareness of the body in time and space. The images proliferate into another layered stack, this time in the form of the path through the forest to grandma's cottage. As each faceless, hooded figure appears, this time to the tune of *Peter and the Wolf,* Oropallo's invisible painterly hand swiftly erases all flesh tone, leaving only red and black visible, which has the effect of each figure gobbling up the one that comes next—Little Red gobbled up by the wolf. The arm that carries

PREVIOUS PAGE

GUISE, 2008
Deborah Oropallo and Jeremiah Franklin
Single channel video; editing and sound design by Jeremiah Franklin
Edition: 8 + 2AP
Running time: 4:16



the basket of goodies and the legs that carry Little Red down the path get snatched out of the frame, leaving nothing but hoods and a trail of Mary Jane shoes traipsing down the stack of mattresses.

As Little Red Riding Hood grows up, she proves unsurprisingly, to be an icon beloved by the sexy cosplay and fetish set. The piece culminates in a cascade of latex Little Reds, a sea of shining crimson, ending with Oropallo's final punctuation, a wolf skin and a spatter of blood. Presumably, Oropallo's Little Red has vanquished the shape-shifting trickster.

In *DIRTY* (2021), Oropallo furthers her exploration of iconic fetish cosplay with the *ur*-sexy costume: the French maid. Here she references the tale of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, also co-opted by Walt Disney for the 1940 film *Fantasia.* Both *DIRTY* and Disney take the symphonic poem *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas as their soundtrack. Over a blurred photograph of a well-appointed kitchen, appears a latex French maid costume and the flourish of a white feather duster, and then another, and another. Again, Oropallo has pulled faces and skin tones out of the figures, leaving graphic, shiny black and white. Here, there is no growth or transformation as in *WHITE AS SNOW* and *WOLF,* only slight variation on the little black (and white) dress of fetish imagery. The figures assemble into an army, the feather dusters into a flock, and then a riot of white that engulfs the visual field.

In *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, the titular character tries on the sorcerer's magic hat, which gives him the power to animate a broom that he commands to carry buckets of water from a well to a cistern: work assigned to him by his mentor. The broom carries out its task without the human sense to stop, flooding the room. The apprentice splits the broom into bits with an axe and the bits animate into more and more brooms, marching in lockstep, dumping bucket after bucket of water, creating an ocean. Oropallo creates an ocean of images from the magic of online searchability. Use Google's sorcery to conjure "sexy latex fetish French maid" and, like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, receive a relentless parade of them, bafflingly similar iterations. Try to vanquish her, and she's in your search history, coming up again to remind you that, as the naughty early aughts musical *Avenue Q* sang, "the internet is for porn." If a thing exists, there's sure to be fetish for it, and the sorcerers and apprentices of contemporary tech have made it possible to find, in seconds, whatever fetish strikes your fancy.

These faceless French maid outfits are a feminine stereotype grown monstrously out of control. Like the animated brooms that take over the

ABOVE AND PREVIOUS PAGE

WOLF, 2019
Deborah Oropallo and Jeremiah Franklin
Single-channel video; editing and sound design by Jeremiah Franklin
Edition of 8 + 2AP
Running time: 2:11

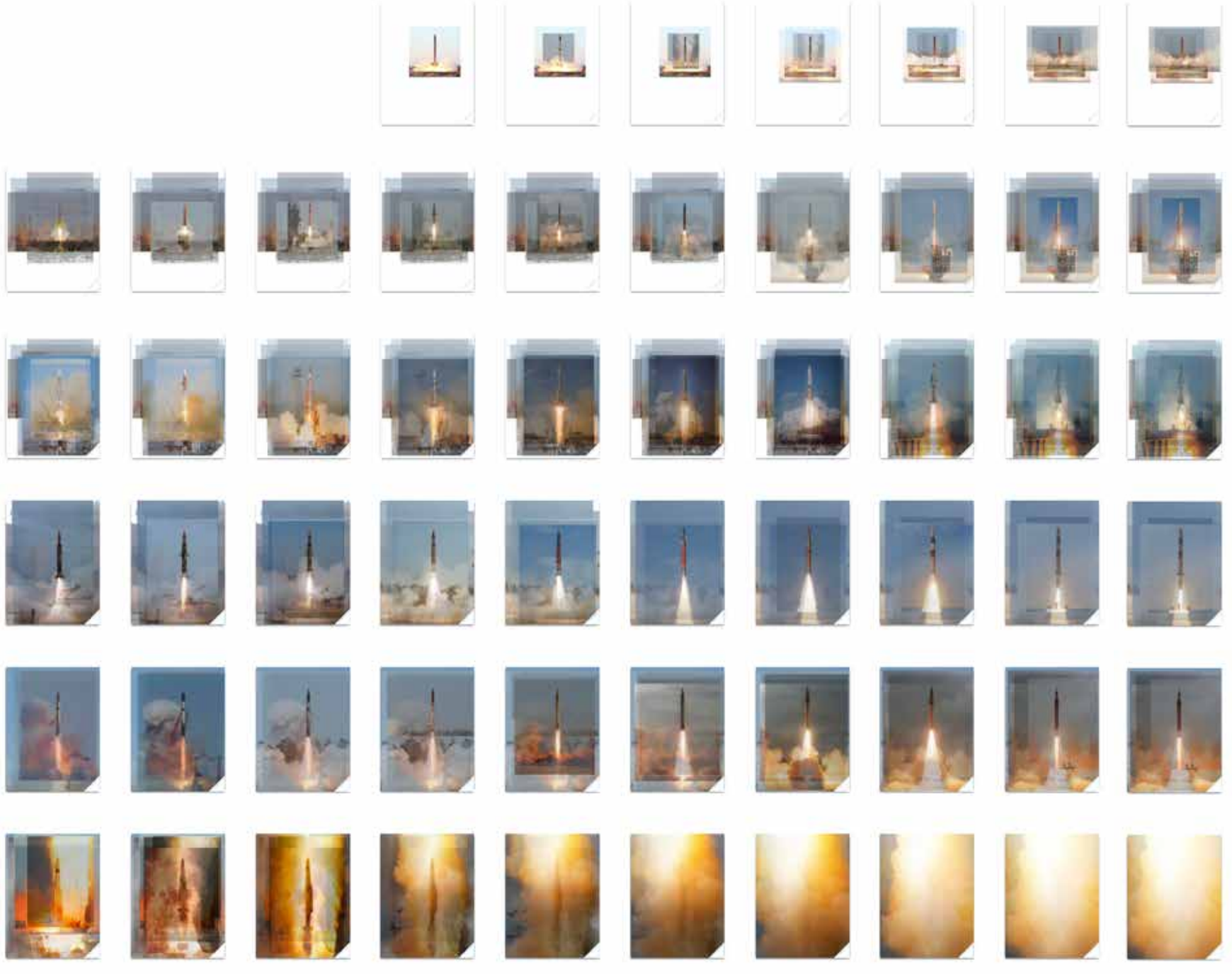
scene in the Disney version, here faceless images of the fetishized female body multiply in an overwhelming accumulation, a parody of feminine-coded domestic labor, an unsettling dance that ultimately obliterates itself under an embarrassment of feather dusters.

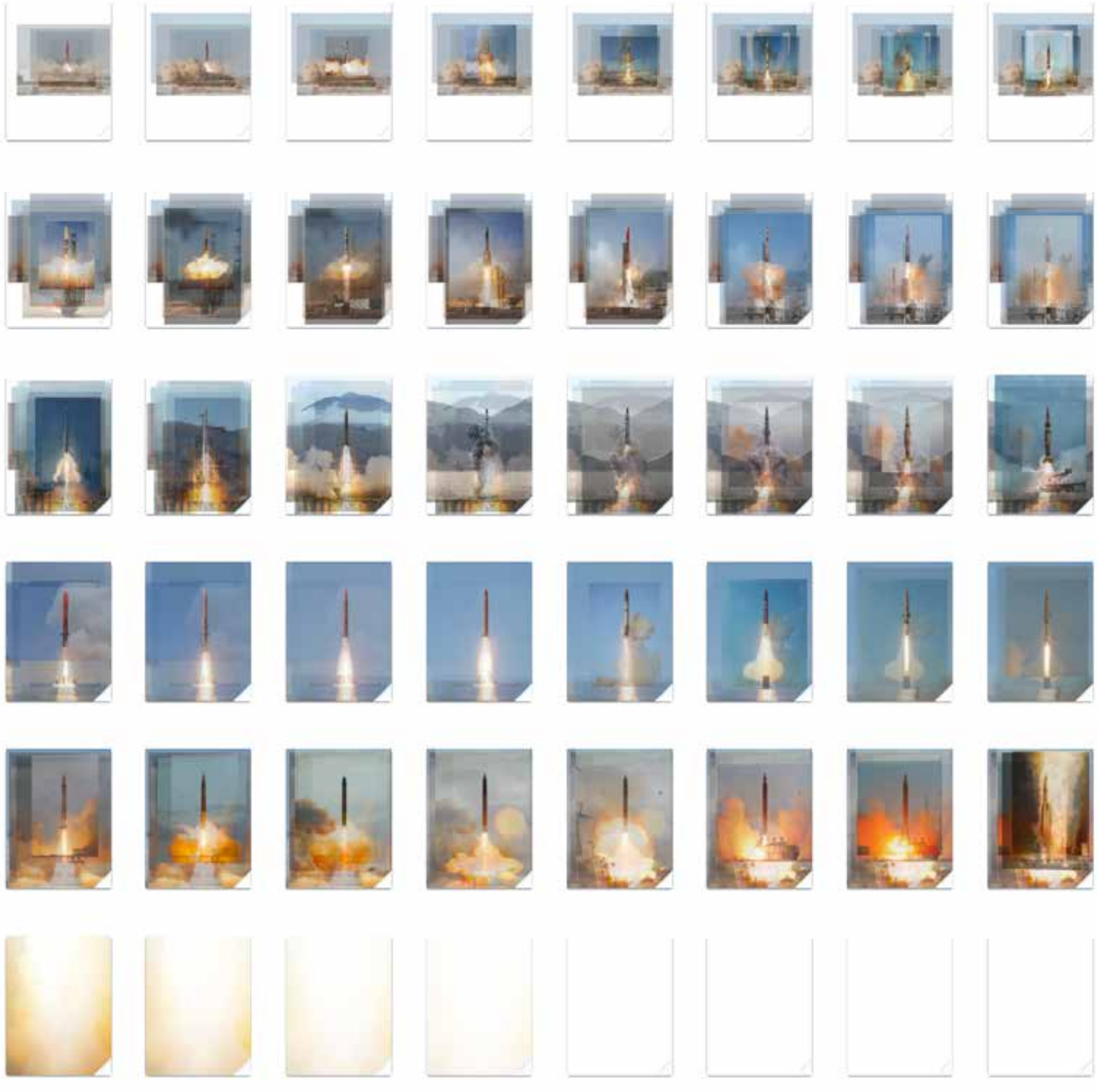
Oropallo's use of the feather duster in *DIRTY* seems to continue her career-long habit of taking quotidian objects (welcome mats, toys, barrels, etc.) as subject matter to ground the work in everyday reality. But *DIRTY* is almost an in-joke between Oropallo and this aspect of her own work. True, a feather duster is a household item, but it is mostly a campy, femme costume accessory, a decorative instrument for playing-at-cleaning.

The drowning by feather dusters in *DIRTY* references the flood that ensues in the original story, but also looks like the finale of a classic burlesque fan dance. Oropallo acknowledges the relentless and insidious fetishization of the female body that multiplies online. However, just when it seems easy to pin down its feminist critique, the work lets out a giggle. Oropallo allows us to have fun with the feather duster, to feel its tickle, and in doing so, drapes her critique in sensuous, tactile abstraction. A "fetish" object, by its original, non-sexual definition, is a magical talisman. So here, the French maid outfits are the brooms, but also the wizard's hat, transforming drudgery and a morality tale about its value, into a Busby Berkely burlesque.

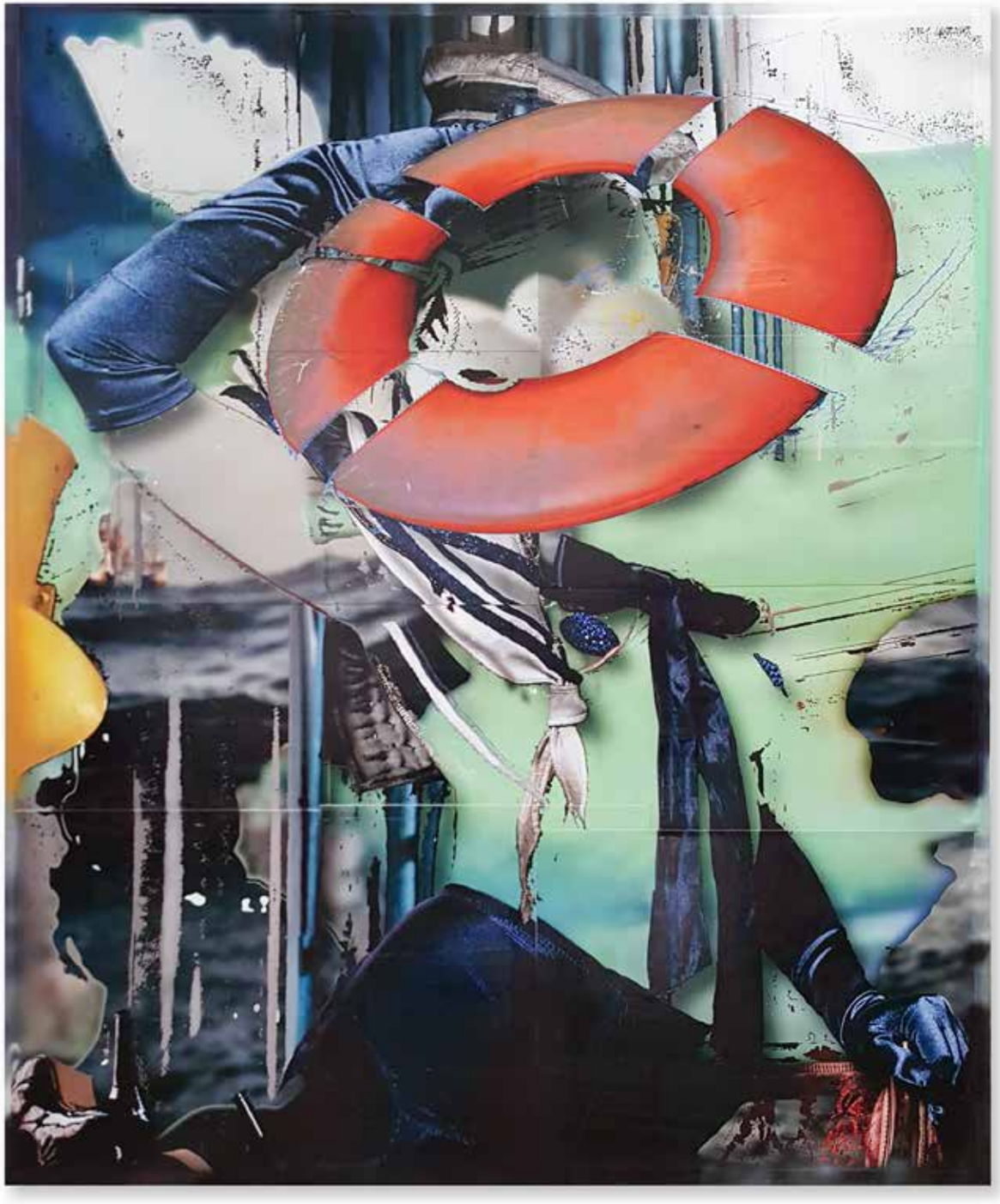
What Oropallo's work so deftly renders is that beneath any transformation—of age, gender, species—lies a trace of what came before. And that is often its most fascinating aspect. She is not interested in clean breaks, but the messiness of memory, the lingering ghost. The stacks of images in *WHITE AS SNOW, WOLF* and *DIRTY* could also exist as stills, semi-abstracted figures that explore color and shape as much as they engage with gender. In *DIRTY*, the feather dusters coalesce into a formal exploration of texture and gradation of white. What could be more painterly, more modern? The drift, or intentional drive, toward the abstract feels like irresistible play for Oropallo. She loves to make shapes, to alchemize into form, and her use of heightened content, be it the growing girl-children and dirty mattresses of *WOLF* or the toppled monuments of her newest video work, does not break the spell. This is what makes her a contemporary-minded, multi-disciplinary master. Throughout this body of work, Oropallo uses her particular sorcery to elevate stereotype to archetype, kitsch to craft, trash to treasure.

Dirty, 2021
Deborah Oropallo and Jeremiah Franklin
Single-channel video; editing and sound design
by Jeremiah Franklin
Edition of 8 + 2AP
Running time: 2:36





GOING BALLISTIC, 2017
Deborah Oropallo and Jeremiah Franklin (with sound mastering and 3-screen video composition by Andy Rappaport)
3-channel video with 2-channel sound
Edition of 8 + 2AP
Running time: 3:45



Rigged, 2016
Deborah Oropallo
Photomontage: UV cured pigment prints,
acrylic paint on paper mounted on canvas
60½ x 50 inches